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# **REP. GEORGE MILLER HOLDS A HEARING ON SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL TURNAROUNDS**

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## **Body**

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HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND LABOR HOLDS A HEARING ON SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL  
TURNAROUNDS

MAY 19, 2010

SPEAKERS: REP. GEORGE MILLER, D-CALIF., CHAIRMAN REP. DALE E. KILDEE, D-MICH. REP. DONALD M. PAYNE, D-N.J. REP. ROBERT E. ANDREWS, D-N.J. REP. ROBERT C. SCOTT, D-VA. REP. LYNN C. WOOLSEY, D-CALIF. REP. RUBEN HINOJOSA, D-TEXAS REP. CAROLYN MCCARTHY, D-N.Y. REP. JOHN F. TIERNEY, D-MASS. REP. DENNIS J. KUCINICH, D-OHIO REP. DAVID WU, D-ORE. REP. RUSH D. HOLT, D-N.J. REP. SUSAN A. DAVIS, D-CALIF. REP. RAUL M. GRIJALVA, D-ARIZ. REP. TIMOTHY H. BISHOP, D-N.Y. REP. LINDA T. SANCHEZ, D-CALIF. REP. JOE SESTAK, D-PA. REP. DAVE LOEBSACK, D-IOWA REP. MAZIE K. HIRONO, D-HAWAII REP. JASON ALTMIRE, D-PA. REP. PHIL HARE, D-ILL. REP. YVETTE D. CLARKE, D-N.Y. REP. JOE COURTNEY, D-CONN. REP. CAROL SHEA-PORTER, D-N.H. DEL. GREGORIO "KILILI" CAMACHO SABLAN, I-NORTHERN MARIANA IS. RES. COMMISSIONER PEDRO PIERLUISI, D-P.R. REP. DINA TITUS, D-NEV. REP. MARCIA FUDGE, D-OHIO REP. JARED POLIS, D-COLO. REP. PAUL TONKO, D-N.Y. REP. JUDY CHU, D-CALIF.

REP. JOHN KLINE, R-MINN. RANKING MEMBER REP. TOM PETRI, R-WIS. REP. HOWARD P. "BUCK" MCKEON, R-CALIF., REP. PETER HOEKSTRA, R-MICH. REP. MICHAEL N. CASTLE, R-DEL. REP. MARK SOUDER, R-IND. REP. VERNON J. EHLERS, R-MICH. REP. JUDY BIGGERT, R-ILL. REP. TODD R. PLATTS, R-PA. REP. JOE WILSON, R-S.C. REP. CATHY MCMORRIS RODGERS, R-WASH. REP. TOM PRICE, R-GA. REP. ROB BISHOP, R-UTAH REP. GLENN THOMPSON, R-PA. REP. BRETT GUTHRIE, R-KY. REP. BILL CASSIDY, R-LA. REP. TOM MCCLINTOCK, R-CA. REP. DUNCAN D. HUNTER, R-CALIF. REP. PHIL ROE, R-TENN.

WITNESSES: SUSAN BRIDGES, PRINCIPAL, A.G. RICHARDSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, CULPEPER, VIRGINIA

THOMAS BUTLER, SUPERINTENDENT, RIDGWAY AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT, RIDGWAY, PENNSYLVANIA

JESSICA JOHNSON, CHIEF PROGRAM OFFICER, DISTRICT AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT SERVICES, LEARNING POINT ASSOCIATES, NAPERVILLE, ILLINOIS

DANIEL P. KING, SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS, PHARR-SAN JUAN-ALAMO INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT, PHARR, TEXAS

DAVID SILVER, PRINCIPAL, THINK COLLEGE NOW ELEMENTARY, OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA

JOHN SIMMONS, PRESIDENT, STRATEGIC LEARNING INITIATIVES, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

Dave Gilson

## REP. GEORGE MILLER HOLDS A HEARING ON SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL TURNAROUNDS

[\*] MILLER: A quorum being present, the committee will come to order for the purpose of conducting a hearing on the best practices in successful school turnarounds, and we'll look at this critical issue of how turnarounds can be accomplished in our nation's failing schools. This hearing continues a series on the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

We've held eight hearings this year looking at a range of issues, from charter schools to effective teachers and beyond, and through these hearings we have learned that to compete in the global marketplace our students must have world-class education system with clear, high, rigorous standards that are internationally benchmarked. These hearings have also brought to light how vulnerable -- excuse me -- how valuable data is in learning and teaching. We need to drive the use of data at all levels of education.

We've also learned that successful schools support its teachers and ensure that all students have access to an effective teacher. But in order to do this we can't simply fix the law by making a few small tweaks; there's much more at stake.

Our global competitiveness is relying on the actions we're taking today and we don't get to do a redo tomorrow what we've done wrong today. It's time to take our education system into the future.

One of our biggest problems in the education system is the dropout crisis and our lowest-performing schools. Turning around our lowest-performing schools is critical to our economy, to our communities, and to our students, and a recent report shows that cutting the dropout rate in half would yield \$45 billion annually to new federal tax revenues or cost savings. There are 5,000 chronically low-performing schools in this country doing a disservice to hundreds of thousands of students. Two thousand high schools produce 70 percent of our nation's dropouts. These are schools where the dropout rates are staggeringly high and where students are not even close to proficient, and where teachers and leaders do not often know what else they can do.

No Child Left Behind dictated interventions to help these schools, but what we've learned since the law was enacted is that they are too prescriptive and very often they're unrelated to the real needs of the schools. Different systems work in different schools. What most of these schools need is a fresh start.

A fresh start doesn't mean shutting down -- necessarily mean shutting down the school; shutting down a school should be the last option after all other improvements have failed and when it's clear that some schools are impervious to change. A fresh start doesn't mean firing all teachers and only hiring back an arbitrary number; you can find some of the best teachers in the worst-performing schools, but they are stuck in the system that isn't supporting them. And if you fire all teachers and you end up getting rid of the ones that are -- you also get rid of the ones that are making a difference.

A fresh start means a buy-in from school leaders, teachers, parents, and the community. It means a team effort to put together the tools that makes schools great.

Thankfully, we're not working in the dark. There is extensive research and real-world examples that can show us the elements that lead to school success.

First, turning around schools is about teaching and learning. It's about giving teachers the resources they need, like data systems to track student progress and a culture of continuous improvement.

Second, it's about using time to the advantage of the school, which can mean an extended learning day which includes successful afterschool programs. It's about making schools have more time they need to catch up and use targeted academic supports as well as enrichment activities like arts, music, to keep students engaged, and time for teachers to collaboratively plan their teaching activities and their daily activities.

Lastly, turning around schools is not about what a community can do to support -- it's about what a community can do to support the school's efforts and what the school must do to meet the community needs. This means that providing wrap-around services to meet individual needs of the students.

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When you put all the right systems in place you can turn around even the worst-performing schools. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today about what works, what does help to turn around our lowest-performing schools and learn from their experience, their expertise.

Thank you so much for being with us, and now I'd like to recognize the senior Republican this morning, Mr. Thompson.

THOMPSON: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And welcome, to our witnesses.

Mr. Kline regrets that he and several other members of the committee are unable to join us today because they're in the midst of debating the National Defense Authorization Act.

Today's hearing addresses an issue critically important to the academic success of our nation's students. In 2001 Congress passed the No Child Left Behind Act, which requires states and each school district to ensure students are proficient in reading and math by the end of the 2013-2014 school year.

For schools that are unable to make what their state has defined as "adequate yearly progress" towards achieving that goal, the law establishes a process to improve these struggling schools and protect the best interests of the students.

Turning around low-performing schools is essential to ensuring lower-income students receive a high-quality education, but to do so effectively takes time. That is why parental choice and supplemental education services, such as free tutoring, were written into the law. These common sense measures offer students an immediate educational lifeline while the schools improve.

Now, I believe we must do everything that we can to help ensure students advance academically even when their schools take the tough but necessary steps towards improvement. Despite the best efforts of Congress and this committee, it's clear too many states are still struggling to improve the standing of their lowest-performing schools.

I look forward to discussing in more detail the challenges schools continue to face, including in some cases a lack of will on the part of administrators to take the dramatic action that may be necessary to improve the schools. I also want to thank Dr. Thomas Butler, superintendent of the Ridgway Area School District, located in my congressional district, for being here today to share his expertise on strategies that rural school districts put in place to turn around their schools.

As policymakers at the federal level, we must remember each school is different and there is no one-size-fit-all solution. The Obama administration has introduced and even promoted several changes to the school improvement system that requires school districts to implement one of only four school turnaround models. There are a number of concerns shared by members in both political parties with the administration's approach, which represents a more intrusive federal role in education policy that is better left to parents and state and local leaders.

Of equal concern, these changes to the existing school improvement grant program have been imposed on the state and school leaders outside of the reauthorization process and without proper congressional oversight. I'm also concerned the administration's blueprint eliminates options for parents of students trapped in chronically underperforming schools. School turnaround is important, but we must ensure that parents and students are at the center of federal efforts to reform education.

We will hear from our witnesses today about their own personal experiences trying to ensure students in underperforming schools get the top-notch education they deserve. Their experience will no doubt inform our work as we look to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing, and I welcome the witnesses and look forward to their testimony.

MILLER: Thank you very much. And thank you for inviting Mr. Butler to participate on our panel.

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All members will have 14 days in which to submit an opening statement on this hearing.

I'd like now to introduce our panel of witnesses. I'll begin with Mr. John Simmons, who is the president of Strategic Learning Initiatives, a nonprofit serving (ph) public schools and consulting on student learning strategies. Mr. Simmons has over 35 years of experience within the field of education in the United States and abroad.

He is also a prolific publisher, having written and edited six books and more than 75 articles on education, and management, and economic development.

Mr. David Silver is the principal of Think College Now Elementary, a position he has held since 2003. His school has focused on closing the achievement gap and moving closer to achieving its vision of equity through free access to afterschool programs, stronger family and community involvement, and aggressive recruitment and professional development of teachers and staff. In 2008 Think College Now was honored as California Distinguished School Award and the Title I Achievement Award.

Dr. Daniel King is the superintendent of the Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Independent School District in Texas. At the school district Dr. King helped establish innovative new programs like College and Career Technology Academy and the T-STEM Early College High School.

As a result, the school district reduced its dropout rate by 75 percent in two years; through an intensive intervention initiative it saw the number of graduates increase by 60 percent. He has over 33 years of working within the education field, including over 20 years as an administrator.

Ms. Jessica Johnson is the chief program officer for the district and school improvement services at Learning Point Associates, which provides evaluation, policy, professional services, and research to help schools boost student learning and improve teaching. Ms. Johnson oversees the work in curriculum audits, improvements planning, curriculum -- you're doing a lot down there -- curriculum alignment and development, literacy, and data use.

(UNKNOWN): We should have just had one witness.

(LAUGHTER)

MILLER: Thank you for being here.

And she has 10 years of project management experience.

And Mr. Thompson is going to introduce our next witness.

THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

It really is a privilege to introduce Dr. Thomas Butler, superintendent of Ridgway Area School District, located in Elk County, Pennsylvania. Dr. Butler holds a Ph. D. in educational leadership from Penn State University where his dissertation focused on how globalization influences collaboration between rural schools and communities.

Dr. Butler's dissertation received an award from the American Education Research Association rural special interest group in 2010. Dr. Butler is currently facilitator for the leadership and teaching course, which is a collaboration between the Pennsylvania Department of Education and the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators.

Recently, Ridgway Area School District received an honorable mention by the Pennsylvania Association of Rural and ***Small Schools*** and the Center for Rural Schools and Communities for the Building Community through Rural Education Award. This accolade recognizes a school -- that schools, as key institutions in rural areas, have crucially important roles to play not only in community economic development, but also in strengthening the social bonds that holds rural communities together.

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Dr. Butler is also a member of the Forum for Western Pennsylvania Superintendents. He lives in Ridgway, Pennsylvania with his wife and three children, and I am pleased that Dr. Butler and his family were able to make the trip from Ridgway to Washington and welcome them to the committee, and I look forward to his testimony today.

MILLER: Thank you.

Susan Bridges is the principal of A.G. Richardson Elementary School in Culpeper, Virginia. In 2004, Bridges successfully led -- Ms. Bridges, I should say; excuse me -- successfully led her staff through the accrediting process of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools in which the strengths and the weaknesses of the school were analyzed and a school improvement plan established. She is the 2006 National Distinguished Principal, as awarded by the National Association of Elementary School Principals and the U.S. Department of Education.

Welcome to our committee. Welcome, to all of you. When you begin your testimony -- we're going to start with Mr. Simmons -- a green light is going to go on, and eventually, after four or five minutes, a yellow light will go on, at which time you ought to think about summarizing and finishing up your -- bring your testimony to a close, but we want you to finish in a coherent fashion and make sure that you've made the points that you want to make when the red light is on. And then we will go to questioning by the members of the committee when you've all finished testifying.

Welcome to the committee.

SIMMONS: Mr. Chairman, Mr. Thompson, and members of the committee, my name is John Simmons. I'm the president of Strategic Learning Initiatives, a Chicago-based nonprofit organization that has enjoyed remarkable success in turning around low-income public elementary schools in Chicago.

We have created a new model for turning around schools. In three years, eight schools in which our model was applied turned around their reading test scores and school culture; the taxpayers saved \$24 million compared to other turnaround models.

The leadership teams of the schools accomplished this without removing a principal or teacher at the beginning, without changing the curriculum or the textbooks, and without converting to a charter or a contract school. The reason for our success is simple: We apply what research has known will work in schools; we avoid untested ideas as surely as any one of you would avoid a medicine that had not been given safe -- proven safe and effective.

Our message today: Apply the basic and the best systemic research. Monitor and celebrate its application. Breakthrough results will happen.

I would like to focus on two themes: first, that reauthorization of ESEA should allow for a strategy like ours, that emphasizes the importance of comprehensive school reform strategies that are grounded in rigorous research and shown to work using existing staff. ESEA should add a fifth intervention model to the four in the Department of Education's blueprint. This would accelerate the rate of change among the lowest-performing schools and save money.

The second theme is that there must be federal investment to demonstrate how to scale up successful schools. We cannot continue to create schools that remain only islands of excellence in a sea of mediocrity.

Again, the research on high-performing organizations shows us how to rapidly diffuse innovation. Specific actions include decentralization of decision-making and expanding the work done in teams.

By applying the systemic research done over the past 20 years in Chicago, we have demonstrated that failing schools can jumpstart their turnaround and transformation in two years. Let me tell you about a specific project we carried out in eight public elementary schools in very low-income and minority neighborhoods in Chicago. When we began, these schools had shown virtually no improvement for the previous 10 years.

Here are the results: Over three years, the eight improved four times faster than their annual progress over the 10 years before starting what we call the focused instruction process. In the first year three schools turned around, and

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all eight turned around by the end of the third year. Two of the eight were the most improved public schools in Chicago in 2007 and 2008 in a city where there are 473 elementary schools.

We define turnaround as improving at least three times faster than the school's rate of improvement before they started the focused instruction process and having a major change in school culture -- teachers, parents, and principal working together in an atmosphere of trust. Two charts on the next two pages in the written testimony provide the charts for the results.

How were these remarkable results achieved? Strategic Learning took the results of the research on high-performance organizations in the private sector and combined it with the research done in education over the past 20 years. Together, these research results clearly show what a school needs in order for it to succeed -- not just public schools, any school.

From the research, the school leadership teams then focus on providing what we call the five essential supports. They include developing shared leadership; offering high-quality professional development for the teachers and the administrators; ensuring instruction is rigorous and focused; engaging parents in learning the Illinois standards so that they can better help their children with their homework; creating a culture of trust and collaboration among the teachers, administrators, parents, and students.

Systematically ensuring that these five essential supports were in place and an effective partnership with the Chicago public school leadership led to the rapidly improving gains in student learning. An independent analysis of the data by the American Institutes of Research reports that this model works, should be supported by the federal government and scaled up.

Applying the research unlocked the success that had eluded these schools for so many years. The heart of my message is this: For too many years the debate about school reform has focused on the type of school -- charter school versus traditional public school.

I believe and Strategic Learning's experience proves that there is a better and less costly way. The research shows that providing these five essential supports will open the pathway to successful reform on a scale that matters.

Mr. Chairman, thank you.

MILLER: (OFF-MIKE) SILVER: My name is David Silver, principal and founder of Think College Now, a public school in a low-income area of Oakland, California.

Why Think College Now? It was founded to reverse a harsh reality: Less than one out of 20 kids in Oakland, many of whom live in poverty, attend a University of California school. When a group of families, educators, and I heard this we knew we had to take action.

Through this small, autonomous school's movement we came together to form Think College Now, TCN, a college prep public elementary school in a low-income within the Oakland Unified School District. Ninety-five percent of our students receive free and reduced lunch; two-thirds are English language learners; and more than 90 percent are Latino, African-American, or multiracial.

Our mission is clear: Close the achievement gap and ensure all our students can go to college and pursue their dreams.

If you refer to slide two, the slide on the screen, what have we achieved? When we opened our doors 8 percent of our students were achieving at or above grade level in English language arts, and 23 percent in math, as measured by the California Standards Test.

Five years later, 66 percent of our students are at or above grade level in reading and 81 percent in math, a gain of over 800 percent in reading and 300 percent in math. What's more, these gains are across every subgroup -- African-American, Latino, English language learner, and students receiving free and reduced lunch, as documented

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in your written testimony. We've also gained 263 points to surpass both district and state averages on the API to have an API of 848.

Because of these gains, as the chairman mentioned, Think College Now was named one of only 50 schools in California to receive both the California Distinguished School and the Title I Academic Achievement Award in 2008.

How did we do it? If you refer to page three and four of your testimony, our focus is equity in action, a vision of student achievement and college opportunity for all students. We have five key levers.

Number one: Unite the entire community on our big goal -- college. Elementary students in high-income neighborhoods know they're expected to go to college. Our students and families do, too.

If you ask any student, family, teacher, or staff at Think College Now, "Why are you here?" the answer is the same: We're going to college. We begin thinking college in kindergarten.

Number two: high expectations. We expect more so we can get different results. There's a level of trust where teachers are expected to get their students to achieve and administration is expected to support them to get there. When our students were not achieving in year two we went and observed high-achieving schools in similar demographics to observe and learn best practices. We are creating a culture where failure is not an option and achievement is the norm.

Number three: Also in year three, we implemented standards, assessment, and data systems to drive instruction and monitor progress. Grade-level teams create a standards-based pacing calendar and lessons to deliver high-quality instruction. Through our six-week cycles, teachers assess student mastery using assessments and data to group students for re-teaching and intervention.

Number four: family and community partnership, the heart of Think College Now. We know we cannot reach our goals alone. We partner with organizations and families for support.

More than half our kindergarten families on a daily basis are in the classroom reading with their kids, and overall, all of our students attend parent-teacher conferences. At TCN, we're not just a school, we're a community.

And finally, perhaps the most important, the backbone of our success, our outstanding teachers and staff. We work relentlessly to recruit, select, support, and retain our teachers.

Honestly, they're amazing. I would put our teachers up against any, not only in California but across the country.

And my recommendations: What can we do? Page five and six of your testimony.

In the fight for educational equity we all must do more. To replicate and expand not only our success but the countless other schools that are doing amazing things to close achievement gaps we must create conditions to support student achievement for all students.

I have five recommendations. Number one, provide schools autonomy for hiring, budget, curriculum, and assessment. First and foremost, ensure sites can hire their own teachers and staff. Selecting a staff invests everyone in the vision; it is the most important lever to increase student achievement at a school.

Number two, maximize budget flexibility. Through results-based budgeting in Oakland Unified we can put resources where they are needed -- into academic intervention, coaching, and time for collaboration. Sites need to be held accountable for results, but not without full control of their budgets and how to spend their resources.

Number three, connect everything to academic growth. At TCN we've created a culture based on student growth and outcomes. There is public accountability of data at the school, classroom, and student level. I support any policy that begins to differentiate schools, principals, and teachers not just on seniority, but on their ability to increase student learning. Number four, ensure all sites have standards assessments. Curricular and assessment



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autonomy helped us to focus on standards mastery instead of fidelity to a commercial curriculum. We piloted standards-based assessments three to four times a year and they are now adopted by our entire district.

And finally, perhaps the most important, increase federal dollars to all Title I schools. It is not fair to demand annual achievement growth while decreasing resources.

While more affluent parents can fund-raise for their schools to alleviate budget cuts, low-income families cannot. Sites that have high poverty populations need more financial resources to meet their needs, period.

In conclusion, we must remember this is not about an I, it is about a we. We will close this meeting -- this session that I will say right now -- like we close every meeting at Think College Now, with an appreciation and a reality: On behalf of all the students, families, and educators working relentlessly in Title I schools, thank you for listening. Thank you for considering recommendations to create conditions for all students, rich or poor, to truly have a shot at the American dream.

And finally, as we say at TCN, the reality is this is the civil rights issue of our time. I, as a principal, cannot address it alone. Parents, teachers, and students cannot do it alone. You, as congressmen, cannot do it alone, as well. But together, we can make a difference. Our students deserve nothing less.

Together, yes we can. Juntos, si se puede.

Thank you.

MILLER: (OFF-MIKE)

KING: Yes. My name is Daniel King. I am superintendent of the Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Independent School District located on the Texas- Mexico border in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas.

I have been fortunate to be involved in two highly successful school district turnarounds. The first case was the Hidalgo Independent School District, a district with about 3,000 students. There, I worked as part of a team -- superintendent in my final eight years in that district -- that transformed a historically low- performing school district once ranked among the worst, rated in the bottom 5 percent in Texas, into a high-performing school district that has developed a reputation for excellence at the state and national levels.

The most unique component of this transformation was the conversion of the district's high school into an early Early College High School for all students, not for some, and the entire school district into an Early College School District -- a systemic transformation. Hidalgo High School has consistently ranked among the best high schools in Texas over the last decade; it was ranked number 11 in the nation by U.S. New & World Reports in 2007.

Hidalgo ISD is considered one of the best in Texas. This district is comprised almost entirely of Hispanic students from low- income households where Spanish is the primary language. The transformation from bottom 5 percent to a decade of receiving accolades for excellence has been empowering for the entire community.

The second case is very informative due to the pace and scale of change. The Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Independent School District, or PSJA, as it's known, is a 31,000-student school district with similar demographics to Hidalgo, down on the border in the southern tip of Texas, and has made dramatic strides in less than three years.

In just two years the PSJA team has taken a district where every high school was labeled a dropout factory and every high school was failing to meet AYP and reduced the real number and rate of dropouts by 75 percent in two years while increasing the real number of graduates by more than 60 percent, from less than 1,000 graduates in 2006-'07 to almost 1,600 in 2008-'09, and a projected 1,800 graduates this school year.

The dropout rate has plummeted from almost double the state average to less than half the state average. For the first time ever all campuses in the district have met AYP.

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Innovations, including a dual credit for high school and college credit dropout recovery high school -- this high school College Career and Technology Academy has graduated 517 dropouts and non-graduates from ages 18 to 26 years old in only two and a half years with most earning some college hours before high school graduation and many continuing on in community college or four-year college after graduation.

In addition, PSJ has used a grant from the Texas High School Project and the **Gates Foundation** to open a T-STEM Early College High School where students can earn up to 60 college hours, or an associate's degree, while still in high school. This unique high school was designed to be a laboratory in PSJA to develop and incubate the concept while preparing for systemic scale-up -- not an island of excellence, but intended to transform the entire system to impact all PSJA high schools and the almost 8,000 high school students and spark district transformation.

Just last week the governor of Texas, Rick Perry, and Texas Commissioner of Education Robert Scott came to PSJA to declare the district a state model for district turnarounds and award PSJA a unique \$2 million grand to scale up our bold initiative All Students College Ready, College Connected.

Through these two experience I have learned the following about school turnaround: High expectations are imperative. It helps to set bold goals. Quality leadership at both the district and campus level is critical.

Systemic transformation is the most effective way to impact low- performing schools, working with -- at all levels -- elementary, middle, and high school, and connecting students on to college, moving away from islands of excellence to systemic excellence and intentionally scaling up best practices.

A high school diploma is not the goal in either Hidalgo or PSJA; connecting every student to a quality future is. I have found success through connecting students to college while they're still in high school.

Twenty-first century high schools should be flexibly and seamlessly connected to high education with students moving to college level work in each and any course of study as soon as they are ready. This includes Career and Technology courses.

Rigor, relevance, and relationships -- and relationships I call caring about students -- are all important. College/Connected Career Pathways add rigor and relevance, allowing and motivating students to move to higher levels of learning.

Career and Technology -- what we used to call Vocational or the Carl Perkins-funded (ph) -- courses are important for creating viable career pathways for all students. These courses should be industry standard and college-connected. I'd like them to be dual credit -- for college credit and leading towards certification, leading towards high-wage, high-skill potential jobs, leading towards certification, associate degrees and bachelor degrees.

Partnerships are important and can accelerate transformation. Partnering with colleges, community colleges, workforce agencies, private foundations, philanthropists, economic development agencies, the community at large, social service agencies, and so forth, helps to accelerate transformation and helps with accountability.

One size does not fit all; each community is unique; each community has unique strengths. We can identify those strengths and build on those strengths.

Thank you.

MILLER: (OFF-MIKE)

JOHNSON: Good morning. Chairman Miller, Congressman Thompson, members of the committee, thank you for having me here today to speak with you about the research and best practices in school turnaround.

My name is Jessica Johnson. I'm the chief program officer for district and school improvement at Learning Point Associates. We're a nonprofit education research and consulting organization with over 25 years of experience working with states, districts, and schools.

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I come to you today with a little bit different perspective than some of my colleagues, and that's primarily because we work with both states and districts to turn around schools and systems. In the past five years my team has worked with over 40 districts across several states in implementing corrective action plans and restructuring under No Child Left Behind, and from that, I'd like to share with you my perspective in terms of what we've learned from the research as well as what we've learned from practice.

I think it's fair to say across the board that the research on turnaround is sparse, and in my written testimony I addressed for you some of the specifics regarding each of the models. But if you look across the board, my colleagues here have already mentioned, there are absolutely key themes that matter, right?

Strong leadership -- absolutely critical. We all know you have to have it. A focus on instruction in the classroom, particularly literacy instruction. Whether you're at the elementary or the high school level, it's absolutely critical.

Solid learning environment for kids -- a belief that all kids can learn and high expectations for all kids is critical for school turnaround and transformation. A supportive culture that engages families and that supports the nonacademic needs of students. This is critical, and if you look at the research you'll find that these nonacademic factors in a student's life matter as much as the teacher and the leader in that school in terms of their overall performance.

And lastly, something that my colleagues also touched on, is the need for staff commitment to change, and that's something that's really hard to get through policy.

So a couple things to think about with regard to this research: One is, we don't know to what effect or to what extent each of these different factors matters in different circumstances. So we know a leader is really important, but we don't know when a leader matters more, or when an instructional model matters more, or how these factor together.

The other thing is, these are all really hard to implement, right? It's one thing to say, "We've got to have strong leaders that know how to use data," as you mentioned, Chairman Miller, "that know how to manage budgets, that can operate flexibly with autonomy." It's another thing to say, "We have enough of these strong leaders so that they can go out to rural Illinois and lead a high school turnaround in that setting."

So this implementation piece, which permeates throughout all of these sort of research and best practices, is really, really critical when we think about policy. And that gets to my next point, which is, the policies that we create have to have the flexibility to allow for schools to gain this commitment, to allow for creativity in meeting the needs where we need them, while still honoring the core elements of what we know works in the research.

So, for example, several weeks ago my staff were reviewing the School Improvement Grant applications for one state, and many of these schools were implementing the transformation model, and many of them indicated they would implement an afterschool program, because as we know, extended learning is one of the requirements of the transformation model. However, what we didn't see in the application was the focus on a coherent extended learning program that tied to the traditional day, that tied to the overall objectives of a school turnaround. And it's unfortunate, but what we've seen is when schools and districts are focused on compliance, when they know, "Hey, we've been sanctioned, and we've been sanctioned before, and we're being sanctioned again," the reaction is to come to compliance, right? Do what I need to do to fill out the plan to get somebody off my back.

So how do we move from that to the real commitment to change that Mr. Silver talked about, right? He clearly said all of our kids and our community -- everybody here is engaged and committed. How do you get that?

I think it's about, in some degree, the flexibility, so focusing on the outcomes. While requiring an afterschool program is a good thing, we really need to require that they have coherence and alignment in their programs across the board, and that's something we can think about.

Now, what that also means is with that flexibility we've got to offer support. So there's been a big focus, I think, on support in terms of implementation of turnaround and school improvement grants; there's been less of a focus in support up front in the needs assessment and planning process.

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Well, the reality is this is where the schools really need the help. As I said, many of these schools were asked to create restructuring plans under NCLB, and now, in some respects, we're asking them to do the same thing, only with a different name. So now create a plan for school turnaround, and if you get it approved then we'll go ahead and bring in supports for you. Really, the supports need to be there earlier on to make sure that the right models are being put in place, that the needs are being assessed properly.

And that leads to my last point, which is, the entire system matters in this process. If we really want to make school turnaround a national movement -- and I think that's really what this is about; that's where the momentum is going -- it's got to be about not just the school as an island.

In small, urban districts, in rural districts, the district is the primary support for those schools. If a principal leaves, that district is the one that's got to come in and backfill and know what to do.

States and regional support systems also provide support and tools for schools and districts, and we've got to be able to tool these folks up in the larger system. External service providers, early childhood providers, community organizations, youth organizations -- we have to look at this alignment and coherence across the board in terms of the support that we put in place.

And so lastly, I want to leave you with one thought, which is, I started off by saying the research on turnaround is sparse, and that's true. What we need to do is be very diligent about how we collect data and how we evaluate what's happening real-time in the system.

We need networks of organizations working together to establish what national benchmarks look like, to share best practices, and we need a aligned data collection system so that we're looking at what's working real-time. We're not doing a five-year study where we don't know the results until five years from now, but we're really collecting data now and making choices about what works by using the data so that we can replicate quickly.

I believe we have a moral obligation to serve our kids. Thank you.

MILLER: (OFF-MIKE)

BUTLER: Good morning, Chairman Miller, Congressman Thompson, members of the committee.

Thank you, Mr. Thompson, for that kind introduction. I'll try to live up to it here in the next few minutes.

Just to orient yourself to where Ridgway, Pennsylvania is, we're at the midpoint between Pittsburgh and Buffalo. We're near the Allegheny National Forest.

We are a very small, rural school. We serve 1,000 students in grades K-12, but that puts us just below the median district population for schools in the United States -- that median population is 1,300.

Today I will discuss with you how we, at Ridgway, have attempted a turnaround in a small, rural school system, and I will also discuss with you some of the challenges that we have found as we've attempted this turnaround.

The foundation for our turnaround at Ridgway has been collaboration and a focus on the children. I think sometimes that we forget that the reason we are here in this room, or here in the school district boardroom, or here in the classroom, is because of the students. The students are the most important.

Years ago in our school district there was an unofficial motto of "what is best for the children." Our decisions are based on what is best for the children. That is the framework.

A great example of how we have focused on collaboration as well as the focus on students and student achievement is our teacher evaluation system, and I'll take a few moments to talk about that. Our teacher evaluation system encourages professional learning by the teachers. In our system, the administrators and the teachers sit down and discuss what the teacher needs to help them improve student achievement.

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Teachers know what needs to be done in their classroom; it's the district's obligation, I believe, to provide those resources to allow that to occur. Some of the ways that our district encourages these meaningful professional learning goals is we send teachers to other districts that have exemplary programs; we send teachers to research-based, high-quality seminars and conferences; and we also encourage our teachers to go for advanced degrees. Those are what we hope for. Some of the challenges that we face because we are in a small, rural school district: When we find -- and we can find -- exemplary programs in our area, but we often have to put teachers on the road for up to three hours to go see those exemplary programs in other school districts. That, of course, is a problem both for finding our substitute teachers as well as putting teachers on the road for that amount of time.

Our second challenge is finding high-quality, research-based conferences and seminars that we can send our teachers to and not spend too much time away from the school district. Again, we attempt to do that but that is a challenge.

Finally, we are located in an area where we don't have a lot of opportunities for post-secondary education for our teachers. I believe that earning your master's degree -- and research will back my opinion up -- will improve student achievement. Because of where we are located, we do have problems finding those kind of opportunities for our teachers.

Now, I've discussed the challenges but I also want to offer what I believe are solutions to this problem for small, rural school districts. May I suggest that this committee can help rural, small school districts by providing quality broadband Internet access to our communities?

While I was driving down here yesterday to testify here I had some teachers and administrators being trained on a program that the school district is going to implement next year. This training, of high quality, was done in a virtual environment through a webinar.

Now, it's more than just having this broadband access; we must also have the school districts have the capacity to use that broadband access in the classrooms. This can be done through training, of course, to make sure the teachers are utilizing the technology properly and integrating it into the curriculum.

Finally, the last challenge that I experience as a superintendent of a small, rural school district is a statewide and national educational bureaucracy that is increasingly more top-down, leaving very little room for local control and flexibility so that we, on the ground in the local communities, can address the problems that we know we can fix. I am concerned that local superintendents will become mere middle-managers instituting educational reforms decided at the state or national levels.

In closing, the problems confronting rural school improvement are not a result of lack of effort or caring among rural educators. It is time for us to start a transformation in education, and the best place to start is in the rural school systems. This can be accomplished through collaboration and professional learning with a boost from virtual learning formats.

I believe with all of my heart that public education in rural areas will lead to an era of rural community revitalization, and more importantly, sustainability. However, I also strongly believe that solutions to problems in rural areas must come from the local areas.

Thank you for your time today, and I will be happy to answer any questions.

MILLER: Thank you.

Ms. Bridges?

BRIDGES: Good morning, Chairman Miller, Mr. Thompson, and members of the committee. Thank you for inviting me to testify this morning.

I'm Sue Bridges, principal at A.G. Richardson Elementary School in rural Culpeper, approximately 70 miles southwest of here. A.G. Richardson enrolls just under 600 students from prekindergarten through the fifth grade

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and employs 84 teachers and staff. Our school's mission is developing the foundation for lifelong success, and my teachers, staff, and I begin each day with this mission in mind.

I know through personal experience that a principal's leadership in a school must be focused on a cohesive mission statement that is centered on student learning. At A.G. Richardson we use data to define who we are, mark our progress over time, and secure and manage the tools necessary to continue to achieve our mission. Staying mission-focused is especially important in a school environment where challenges can and do pop up at any time.

I firmly believe that I have been successful in leading change in my school because of my hardworking and dedicated staff and because of the support and flexibility in decision-making that I have been given by the school district's administration. To be effective all principals require the authority and autonomy to make necessary changes in their school buildings. This means principals must be able to arrange building staff and resources to address the needs of students and to work collaboratively with colleagues, both inside and outside of the school, to identify the tools needed to sustain change and growth.

There is no single plan or one set of resources or one style of leadership that will make every school successful. Each school has its own personality and culture, and successful leaders use this information to make critical decisions every day.

My school recently experienced a significant change. In 2007 A.G. Richardson was redistricted, along with five other schools in Culpeper County. My staff and I had to lead our school and community through this challenging time while remaining focused on our school's mission.

Redistricting resulted in 60 percent of our students being redistricted to a new school and replaced with students who were entering our building for the first time. Our school district is large and quite remote in parts. While there are a number of neighborhoods now feeding my school, they are scattered throughout the district and are several miles apart. My staff and I quickly realized that we needed to take great measures to assess the individual needs of our new students in order to target instruction accordingly. We made two strategic changes to remain focused on A.G. Richardson's mission while bringing our new school family together.

First, we focused on the need for more real-time data to inform classroom instruction. Grade-level teams began employing targeted assessments to identify their students' specific skills and needs and then divided their students into small groups for direct instruction. During this process it was my job to keep data discussions among teachers current and to help them make effective instructional decisions, to help secure volunteers to work with small groups of students, and to allow for flexible scheduling of teachers' time to accommodate their small-group instruction.

I began holding biweekly differentiation meetings with each grade level to look at benchmarking data, student work, and standardized test data. We knew it was critically important to monitor our students' performance throughout the school year so problems could be identified and remediated right away. To further A.G. Richardson's mission teachers shared their successful instructional strategies with each other and worked collaboratively to identify and refer our neediest students for Response to Intervention services, which provided more intense, skill-specific instruction.

Second, my staff and I identified the need to reestablish an atmosphere of a neighborhood school to develop a sense of community. I established what we call the Parent Liaison Program to bring the school families together.

Parent representatives from each of A.G. Richardson's neighborhoods serve as a two-way communication tool for me and for each other. I use them to solicit feedback, to seek volunteer help, to gauge the progress my school is making throughout the school year, and to identify problems that may need to be addressed. In turn, these parent liaisons communicate with me concerns and issues bubbling up in their specific neighborhoods.

I meet quarterly with the parent liaisons to discuss future projects and activities, to solicit feedback, and to have an open dialogue. Families who are new to our school are paired up with a parent liaison in their neighborhood to provide them with a connection to our school.

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We recently performed a parent survey at A.G. Richardson. While I collected and tallied the data my parent liaisons reached out to individual families in their respective neighborhoods to solicit additional feedback.

This approach has helped to develop a collaborative spirit between and among A.G. Richardson's families and schools, but it has also afforded me the opportunity to focus more of my time and attention on the instructional needs at the school and to manage the change process we've been going through in recent years. Instituting change in any organization is difficult, and schools are certainly no different. Leading change at A.G. Richardson required establishing and affirming our school's mission, keeping all staff focused on that mission, and securing and analyzing current data to inform the classroom instruction of our students.

As the principal, I lead instruction by showing my teachers and staff what is possible and supporting them with procedures and resources so they can get the work done. I prop up their efforts by working collaboratively with them to analyze student data and monitor progress over time. As a result of our strategic learning focus we have seen progress in our student achievement and have maintained scores in the 80 percent range for grades three through five in reading, math, social studies, and science.

As the instructional leader, principals must have -- they do have a vital and unique perspective of their school. Because of this, principals understand that local decisions -- staffing, resource priorities, infrastructure needs, et cetera -- must continue to reside at the school level and district level where community and school needs can be adequately weighed and addressed.

Recent proposals from the federal government have recognized the important role principals play in turning around low-performing schools but fail to factor in the need for locally-based decision-making. I would argue -- and research backs this up -- that principals are responsible for leading change in all schools, and perhaps more importantly, sustaining changes that focus on student learning.

Principals -- especially those in challenging circumstances -- must grow in their jobs. Just as teachers work collaboratively with each other to hone best practices in the classroom, principals learn best from each other through networking and mentoring opportunities.

We know that principals are second only to classroom instruction in positively impacting our students' achievement and must work collaboratively with teachers and parents to be successful. Principals are experts at managing requests and putting into practice what is best for the students who come through the school doors every morning.

Ask any principal at any given time what they must be an expert in, and be careful of their response. Principals are teachers, nurses, counselors, finance directors, curriculum experts, plumbers, lunch aides, behavior specialists, marriage referees. You name it, the principal has done it. But most important role the principal plays is making decisions that are best for his or her students and staff.

Beginning last week and continuing over the next two weeks -- and currently as I speak right now -- A.G. Richardson Elementary is completing Virginia's state assessments, the SOLs. I know my students, teachers, and staff each week are all breathing a little bit easier as we complete each assessment. I am breathing a little bit easier but I also know that the pressure will mount again as we await the result of those assessments and what that will mean for my school.

I continue to lead my school to remain focused on our mission and will navigate all challenges thrown in our path. And because I know my teachers, my staff, and families so well, I know we'll continue to succeed.

Thank you for providing me with this opportunity to address you today. I would be happy to take any questions from the committee.

MILLER: Well, thank you very much to all of you. This is an incredibly arrayed panel here. We have the mean school district -- you said about 1,300 is the mean and you're 1,000 -- and we have a school here that's half that number in one elementary school, urban, rural, and then mix in the very large district.

In this round of questions I'd like to raise a couple questions, Dr. Simmons and Mr. Silver.

Dave Gilson

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Dr. Simmons, you did these turnarounds and the strategic initiatives with existing personnel -- local school boards made the decision about the teachers they had, the principal that they had, and your initiative came in to that process.

Mr. Silver, you selected your teachers because you were starting a new school within the school district, so you had the opportunity to select your first tiers (ph) of teachers. But that wasn't necessarily just a linear path to success; there were -- you didn't select the perfect teachers, each other (ph) those people, so you had to deal with this question of capacity and building that capacity for them to be able to work in a school.

And I just wonder if you might comment on that, because one of the concerns has been that -- the suggestion has been that if you just close the school, fire people, rehire, that you're on your road to success. Not every school gets the opportunity to do that, nor necessarily wants to do that; they'd rather distinguish -- but you still have to build, what is apparent by what's taking place in that school in that time, additional capacity to achieve these turnarounds. I just wonder if you might comment on those sort of two different models and how you dealt with dealing -- that existing structure and a modified structure that Mr. Silver had?

SIMMONS: When we look at the schools in Chicago we find so many teachers and principals who have not had the opportunity to really show what they could do, so there's this vast resource of people who are out there, and when they get the right model based on the research, the right support -- support from the central office -- and they have a great school leadership team, all these things come together and the existing teachers respond in ways that exceeded their expectations, our expectations, the expectations of the central office. There's a vast resource out there that is untapped.

MILLER: Thank you.

Mr. Silver? SILVER: I think that in the beginning of our school we were able to get the seeds of success, in terms of creating a culture, creating a big goal, creating systems for collaboration, creating a team, getting family involvement.

And as we went forward, when our student achievement in year two was only at 10 percent of our students actually reading at grade level or above, there were two key things that I think that we did that helped to propel us going forward. Number one is, we went and observed at other high-achieving schools with similar demographics. You know, when we started this school we always said, "We're going to close the achievement gap; we're going to make sure that all students in low-income areas can learn."

Until we actually saw African-American and Latino students in low-income neighborhoods achieving at high levels there was a part of even me that didn't believe it; but when we saw that, when we took our entire staff and we saw that this could be a reality, things shifted. We knew that we could do this and we had a responsibility to do it.

The second thing is that -- what we learned from that visit is the focus on standards and data. In the beginning we were not necessarily focused. We were told we needed to focus on curriculum or other things. That didn't work.

We need to focus on standards; we need to align ourselves and make sure that we had data cycles. At this point, starting in year three, every one of our teachers knew exactly where each student was at with respect to the standard that they were supposed to learn and had mechanisms to re-teach that standard and intervention support to do it.

MILLER: Thank you. When I visited Rosco (ph) Academy, we're talking about teaching to the test in the school and the principal, "We'll educate the kids; the tests will take care of themselves."

You talk about teaching to the standards in other schools in my area, just down the road from where you are, and a lot of it's about teaching to the test. What's the distinction in these two educational models?

SILVER: It is our responsibility to make sure that all our students are learning standards. The distinction is this: When I was a teacher when I started in my first year Compton, California, through Teach for America, there were no real standards. There was no real high-stakes test. I was teaching whatever.



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And now, you know, when students are in schools, often they come in with different backgrounds and they come in with different levels of learning. And students in poor neighborhoods often come into kindergarten way behind their more affluent peers.

Without a clear standard there is no way for us to increase our expectation and make sure that all our students learn. It is our responsibility to make sure that the standards of California are taught in English language arts, in math, in science and social studies, and in all the different subject levels. And without a standard and without a way to measure that standard there will be no equity.

MILLER: Dr. Simmons?

SIMMONS: I agree. I think that's a very well-put statement.

MILLER: That's enough from you.

Dr. Johnson, we hear all the time, and certainly we discuss the federal role in education -- one size doesn't fit all. But as you pointed out, and I think as the witnesses have said individually here, there are key elements. There are elements of success, and we're in the process of sort of trying to distill those to the extent that we can so that people can reach for those elements as they think about turning around their individual schools.

But also, you talk about this vision, this connection of this experience to what comes next, and Dr. King's, Mr. Silver's, and Dr. Simmons' testimony -- it's the vision, it's the vision of success and career, or college, or job -- there's this connection. I remember maybe in the '70s and '80s people lamented that the world of work really didn't work for these students because when I graduated and in the town I went to, you graduated from high school, you probably went to the sugar refinery or the oil refinery, or you went to the chemical plant or to the steel mill. You kind of knew what you were going to do because other people in the town were doing that.

Today it doesn't work that way, and yet you have the connection here -- very strong connection -- to the parents and others thinking about, this is connected to whether or not I can go to college and succeed in college. The STEM program connects them to careers and opportunities and knowledge about the academics and the career opportunities, as I understand this. Mr. Hinojosa has explained this to me over and over again, and I finally got it.

And in your case, it's a community -- my takeaway was that they decided that this school is the most important cultural and economic asset that they have, and it's about their kids' future. I mean, it's connected in that sense.

And I just wondered if you would comment -- maybe I'm off base here -- but as you think about how you put these elements together it also has to have a vision for that parents -- for those parents and that community, it seems to me.

JOHNSON: Yes. I think that's absolutely critical. And one of the challenges, what do you do in the places where there don't seem to have that vision? So how do we push people along to that vision?

We have to show them what's possible. We have to show them -- you know, the comments earlier about not only the state standards and/or kind of the common core standards that are coming out in ELA and math, but also looking at those 21st century skills and the 21st century sort of standards of excellence. We need to give parents and community and school that vision of what's possible, and I loved what Mr. Silver said about taking folks out to see those schools in terms of the individual teachers. This is the real challenge.

How do you take these isolated pockets and show them what's possible? You've got to highlight the models that are really working; you've got to bring them -- in some cases, rather than taking a whole teaching staff to see another school, you've got to bring those models in to those schools, and not just to the teachers and the staff, but also to the parents and community.

And I also think you can incent community groups and youth organizations to be aligned with the school's turnaround program.

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MILLER: I want to give Dr. Kind a moment if he wants to respond to the question.

KING: No. I agree that the connection is important and it's important to have -- you know, I believe in big, bold goals, and, you know, if really setting out, you know, the challenge -- you know, in PSJA, when I got there the first problem that hit me in the face was the dropout situation, and we set a goal in that first year to cut it in half, and we achieved that. We didn't set a goal to cut it by 5 percent, but we set a goal to cut it in half.

In a matter of five weeks we opened a brand new high school to bring back dropouts age 18 to 26 and get them their high school diploma and connect them to college. That was instantly successful, and in a matter of three months we graduated the first 50, and the community got all excited -- the district, the teachers -- and they saw the capacity that, you know, we can do something, we can make a difference.

And by this August, within three years we'll have graduated 700 from that school of dropouts and would-be dropouts connecting dropouts straight to college. So the connections, the big picture, you know, looking at the needs of that community, all of those things are important.

MILLER: Thank you.

In my second round I'd like to get Mr. Butler and Ms. Bridges' response, but I want to turn to Mr. Thompson now for his...

THOMPSON: Thank you, Chairman.

Dr. Butler, thanks again for coming and testimony, and your leadership in Elk County at Ridgway School District. In your testimony you highlighted the difficulty that rural areas have with the U.S. Department of Education -- excuse me; I just came off of a five-day Ag (ph) public hearing, so if I start talking about cotton and peanuts you know why - U.S. Department of Education's four school turnaround models. And during the release of the regulations the department said, and I quote, "We understand that some rural areas may face unique challenges in turning around low-achieving schools, but note that the sufficient amount of funding available to implement the four models will help to overcome the many resource limitations that previously have hindered successful rural school reform in many areas."

So my question is, you know, is that accurate? Is the money the primary obstacle to school turnaround in rural areas? And what are the main challenges that rural school districts face in turning around the low-performing schools if not overall money?

BUTLER: OK. A very good question.

We, at Ridgway, were very excited when the Race to the Top came out and we looked at those reform models until we -- you know, the devil's in the details. And we were excited at first because we were hoping we could have the -- use some of the money for the professional learning. You know, in our school district we get the teachers and then we are responsible, I believe, to make sure they get to a standard of performance where student achievement is going to improve.

We look for teachers -- you know, teaching comes from the heart, and I think you can see that from Mr. Silver, his passion to help, and that's what we look for in teachers. So when we first looked at those models that is what we were excited about, that we would be able to have funds to go out and make sure we help these teachers who have the heart, we can also give them the skills.

The turnaround models for our area are really a non-starter, I believe. For example, if you're going to close a school down to send the school -- you know, students to another high-performing school within your district, there is none because that's the only elementary school, that's the only middle school. If you are going to, you know, get rid of 50 percent of the teachers and your principal, that is a major challenge, and that's why, you know, I just want to go back to the fact of how much, you know, I am very proud of the collaborative effort that we've had with the teacher evaluation, how that was put together.

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And also, you know, there is a responsibility on the school district's part, I believe, in a rural area to get that teacher up to par, up to snuff. But it's also up to the school district to make sure if the teacher's not doing that that they're no longer in front of students.

THOMPSON: Thank you.

Ms. Bridges, you talked about the importance of ensuring that policies and interventions that are put in place to turn around low- performance schools must remain at a local level. The administration, on the other hand, believes that state and local leaders lack the will to undertake the fundamental reforms to turn around the most persistently low-achieving schools.

Can you provide any examples that you know of as the president of a state organization where state and local officials have made the difficult decision to close a school or to institute dramatic school reform efforts, and what impact would the four turnaround models have on your school and school district?

BRIDGES: I don't have any specific examples that I'm familiar with with regard to schools that have been closed. However, I can speak to what the turnaround models would -- the impact they would have on our district.

Similar to Dr. Butler, if you closed the school it would result -- while there are six elementary schools in my district, closing one would result in overcrowding conditions in the other five. We just underwent redistricting to resolve that issue. Closing a school would recreate that issue once again, where we would have insufficient space to serve the students that we currently have.

When you talk about firing 50 percent of the staff, what criteria would be used? I think we need to be real careful and clear on the criteria that's used to select which 50 percent go and which 50 percent stay. That falls on teacher evaluation procedures, which I feel like we have a good, solid program in our district, but the documentation would need to be present. You'd better be able to document why 50 percent -- who stays and who goes. I think that would be a serious impact.

Truthfully, it's difficult finding highly qualified teachers. Virginia is in a unique perspective of we often have more teaching positions available than teachers to fill them. We rely on our neighbors in Pennsylvania, actually, to recruit. We recruit heavily in Pennsylvania.

I'm a Pennsylvania native that got transplanted to Virginia. And so I think that's an impact. It would result in tremendous efforts to recruit highly qualified teachers. That would be difficult.

Charter schools -- when you talk about an agency taking over a school, you know, it takes time to get to know a school and the school culture. A new leader coming in needs to know the school culture and the community it serves, and I think it would take -- there's a learning curve. I'm not convinced that immediate change would be evident because it takes time to get to know the culture and then make the changes to make a positive impact.

THOMPSON: Thank you.

Dr. King, you noted in your testimony a number of criteria for how to move ahead with this, and quality leadership at both the district and campus levels -- you noted that that was critical. And I wanted to see, first of all, specifically, what positions were you talking about within your operation, your school district, that you zero in on for developing that level of quality in terms of the leadership?

KING: Of course, at the campus level, the principal's position and the rest of the campus leadership team -- the assistant principal, dean of instruction, whatever they might have depending on the size of the campus. At the district level, you know, the superintendent, whoever's in charge of curriculum and instruction in particular and whoever's in charge of personnel and staff development. Those are all, you know, all very, very critical positions and you need to have, you know high-caliber people, you know, that have a vision and that want to move forward and don't want to just do whatever they did last year. It's very important to have that in all of those positions.

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THOMPSON: Are there specific strategies you employ, then, to -- or what strategies do you employ to raise that level of leadership within those individuals?

KING: Well, to begin with is to set the expectation very clearly of what's expected of people in those positions to, you know, and to provide assistance, to provide training, and if need be to move people around and do whatever needs to be done to make sure you've got the right people in the right chairs to get the job done, because you've got to have that to get there.

THOMPSON: OK.

MILLER: Thank you.

Ms. Hirono?

HIRONO: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I think the mantra now is turning around low-performing schools, and there are many models emerging.

And, Ms. Johnson, you mentioned that there's not a lot of data to really support the various models as yet.

So here are these schools all across our country and they're being asked to turn around their schools, and they -- what can the federal government do to support the ability of our school districts and, indeed, our schools to figure out what models are out there, what might work for them? How can we help to provide them with access to appropriate models? That's one question.

Would you like to answer? Would any of the rest of you...

JOHNSON: Sure. I think, first of all, as we go through this process the federal government can play a role in this idea of national data collection. So right now we're starting this first way of school improvement grants, and you've got hundreds, possibly thousands -- we don't know yet -- of schools undergoing this attempt to do turnaround. What are the consistent metrics we're going to look at across the board so that we have a better sense of what works where and what matters most?

The other thing I think we can do is focusing the policy on the outcomes that we know make a difference without being overly specific about the means to get there. So this issue of teacher replacement and what to do about teachers -- the federal government can play a role in ensuring that schools have tools and supports to help them hire the right kind of teachers for turnaround, and the policy should require that schools have teachers in place that are committed to change, that understand they're going to be evaluated and are publicly accountable for what they're doing, but that when they fire 20 percent or 50 percent doesn't so much make a difference. So putting those tools and structures and supports, I think, are critical.

HIRONO: We have four turnaround models, and would I be accurate in saying that for all of the panelists that that's way too restrictive to just have four models, that we ought to come up with some language in the law in the reauthorization that allows for a more flexible approach for schools? And I don't know what that language would be, but is there agreement that the four models, too restrictive?

Yes? OK.

BUTLER: Yes. For sure.

HIRONO: I get that.

Some of you mentioned that recruiting teachers, especially in those models which require restructuring of the schools, that's a tough thing to do. For example, in the state of Hawaii we can't just go to the next-door state. We actually have to get them to fly over and -- our teacher turnover is really high in some of our schools to the point

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where students that I've talked to say, when I've asked them, you know, "What makes it hard for you to learn in this school?" and they said, "Our teachers don't stick around. They're not around."

So, Mr. Simmons, you have an interesting model because your model is that you don't really -- you don't move everybody out. How do you get the kind of buy-in that we need at those schools that are underperforming so that real changes can occur?

SIMMONS: How do we get the buy-in? That's an absolutely crucial question that most leaders at the top don't ask effectively.

We get the buy-in by asking people do they want to participate. In all of our schools we require the principals to have an 80 percent vote of the staff before we started to work with them -- a secret vote that was reviewed by the union representative so that teachers had to buy in in terms of saying that they were willing to work with it.

Same thing with the principals. They had to volunteer. This was not a mandate. It makes an enormous difference if people willingly sign up for using these kinds of funds. So that's central.

The other piece in the buy-in is that it is important for people to then participate in fine-tuning the program. We call it a process because it's flexible. Flexibility is one of the key words I've heard this morning.

Principals need autonomy. They need the flexibility. Well, focused instruction process we use provides them that up front. They are empowered to make changes and to continuously improve the model as they get the data.

So these are things that get the teachers to stay in the buildings. We have very low turnover in these buildings. It may have been very high -- 30, 40 percent. Schools start to use these kinds of processes and guess what? The teachers want to stay.

HIRONO: So your organization is participating or working with these schools over a period of three or four years. What happens after you leave? How do the schools sustain their commitment?

SIMMONS: It's up to the leadership of the buildings and the district to provide the support, the climate for sustaining it. In some schools it works very well. Sometimes there's a new principal comes in, not interested in continuing. That's a problem.

That's where the local school councils in Chicago make such a difference, because the councils are there, elected by the parents and the teachers, to look at what's going on. When they see there's a program they like they go to the principal who's new and say, "We want to keep this program. It works."

HIRONO: My time is up.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MILLER: Mr. Guthrie?

GUTHRIE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I have a question for Ms. Bridges. I'm from Kentucky, and Kentucky has the Site-Based Decision Making Council, which has three teachers, two parents, and a principal on each, and they kind of -- they govern the school, for lack of a better -- there's a school board and everything still there, but they really govern the school. And one of the issues that I worked on when I was in the state legislature, when I would go visit schools that were turned around or had areas that other schools in a similar area weren't as successful and schools that were extremely successful -- we have some that were top performers; it was always a strong principal with a good staff that led a great staff.

In Kentucky the teachers can, over at the site base, actually hire the principal. So it's the opposite of having authority over the teachers. It can be the opposite. In most cases -- almost all instances -- it works OK, but it troubled schools sometimes it doesn't.

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And so my question is, in Virginia, as a principal, what kind of authority do you have? Because you talked about how principals need more flexibility, more authority in a school in your testimony. Could you just give some examples of your authority and some things that you can do if there's problems in the school? And can you hire and fire? I guess that's the question.

BRIDGES: I am afforded a fair amount of flexibility in my decision-making thanks to my supportive central office administration. I do have the authority to determine my school schedule -- how long will a school day be -- within reason. I'm limited by bus transportation; all of our students are bussed. But how am I going to use that instructional time? How much time will be devoted to reading instruction? How much time will be devoted to remedial instruction to address concerns? Enrichments -- the opposite end of the spectrum, because we have to consider both needs.

Flexibility with regard to my school funds -- I'm given a lump sum. How do I choose to spend that money? I am given flexibility with that.

I cannot hire and fire. I am given the authority to recommend for hire and fire as long as -- and the human resources department is supportive of my efforts as long as I have documentation, of course, to support that.

But a principal has to be given the authority to hire who they need. I'll give you an example. Recently we went through a committee of interviewing candidates for a third grade vacancy. The candidate I wished to hire had a master's degree, highly qualified. She had been a long-term substitute in my building and we felt she'd be a great fit for my third grade team.

When I made the recommendation initially to my human resources department I was told, "She'll cost us too much money. We've only budgeted X amount of dollars for teachers. She will cost us too much money. You need to find another candidate."

I argued with her and argued the fact that she was replacing a retiring teacher, so in fact, she was going to be costing the district less money in the long run, and I did win, fortunately. I can't say that's the same for all principals, but those are the kinds of decisions and flexibility that we need to have.

GUTHRIE: Thanks.

And there's one other thing I wanted to ask you. You talked about using real-time data for driving instruction in the classroom. One of our issues -- and actually it's changed since I've been in Kentucky -- but we -- or it's in the process of changing -- but we always tested our students in the spring and then the results would come back in October and we used the results for assessing the school. And it was a fairly OK -- I mean, it worked statistically that you could assess the school with that, I think, accurately.

But what our system wasn't designed to do and didn't do was drive instruction to the particular student. And so they're trying to change that. The legislature has done some really good work -- since I left, I guess is why they're doing better work. I worked on it until I came here.

And so what kind of real-time data are you using in the classroom? Because our testing drove school -- and I think in No Child Left Behind it's a kind of similar model -- our testing drives school -- assessing schools instead of assessing students so a teacher can have something at their hands that they can use and use that directly to instruct that student. And I just kind of wonder what kind of real-time data you have from that perspective. BRIDGES: Spring assessments -- end-of-the-year assessments -- can often be referred to as an autopsy. They tell you what you did wrong but they don't necessarily help you. Yes, they do assess your school and how you did, but it does nothing to really affect change immediately. We recognize that.

We use what we call real-time data -- I'm referring to benchmark assessments. We're fortunate to have an online assessment program that disaggregates our data for us immediately.

The teachers can assess, get their data -- it's broken down by question and student performance on those questions -- and then they group their children according to the performance on those assessments. Those

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benchmark assessments are given every six weeks -- four to six weeks, depending on the assessment and the length of the unit.

We also administer some growth model assessments which are really important: the Developmental Reading Assessment, the DRA; PALS, which is unique to Virginia, the Phonological Awareness and Language Screening that's given three times a year. We also administer MAP, which is Mapping Academic Potential, through NWEA. That's a growth model.

That information gives us specific data right now -- how are students performing -- and we're able to look at that data and made adjustments and instruction to make improvements right then and there instead of waiting...

GUTHRIE: Our yellow light -- well, the red light just came on, so I'll yield back.

MILLER: Mr. Silver, did you want to respond on...

SILVER: I was just going to say...

MILLER: ... Ms. Bridges made?

SILVER: Yes. I mean, I think your question is right on and her answer is right on. While the high-stake testing (ph) is in the end in California, for example, those benchmark assessments that are aligned with that every four to six weeks are essential, and we get those back real-time, within five minutes. Teachers are in the office scanning it in and getting those results by student, by standard, by question, and we have data conferences afterwards with each teacher to figure out where are our students at, what are the plans that they're going to do, and also asking what is the support you need from us as we got forward to make sure all students can achieve?

MILLER: Ms. Woolsey?

WOOLSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

It's about time you were here, Dr. Simmons. We've had a whole series of hearings and every one I've thought and said out loud -- I've even said it to Mazie -- "Where's John Simmons?" Well, you're here because this is the perfect place and the perfect panel for you to be on.

I have so many questions, Mr. Chairman, I could go on and on.

So I'm going to start first with you, John. In your program, which sounds like a model that we should all just take very seriously, do you have evaluation systems? Is that important as a part of your measuring the outcomes -- well, not the outcomes -- measuring your teachers? And how many teachers were terminated over this period of time in order to make things better? That's my direct question to you.

And then to the whole panel, I'd like to know if you've run into any reluctance -- and your own included -- to actually embracing a new system of reauthorizing ESEA? We brought out No Child Left Behind and forced that on everybody.

Now, are you having any reluctance with your colleagues, peers, and the teachers saying, "Come on, you're not going to put another thing on us. We don't believe it; it's just a new administration that's got some new bells and whistles"? How are we going to prove to you that we really mean this and that we're going to build on what we've learned?

So start with you, John, and your...

SIMMONS: The evaluation question is very important. The data from our schools is that the principals are in the classrooms observing what the teachers are doing on a much more regular basis than ever before in the past. They really see themselves as instructional leaders.

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Second, teachers work together to help each other improve their teaching. And assessment every four weeks is important. We have assessments every five to seven days of the students' work. They are no-stakes assessments that the teachers give them and get back within 24 hours.

So that data is used to assess each other. They are getting the students of the teacher before them in the next grade level below. They are desperate to improve the quality of that teaching immediately, especially when they see low-performing results. So there's a built-in process into what we have here which has continuous evaluation of the teachers, which they and the principals are under control.

Have a lot of teachers left for poor performance? Not in our buildings. Why? Well, because the performance is steadily going up and people are working together in ways that they hadn't before.

And furthermore, this process brings in the students. When students who are underperforming go into their success time every day, in terms of if they're underperforming on the standard they go into success time, other students that are -- have mastered the model come and help students who have not mastered. "Jimmy, come on. I want you to play my computer games with me. You've got to give this author's purpose standard together. What's wrong?" So the students start to help each other voluntarily, and in the first five to six weeks when we started this process and these kids started to do this without any help from the teachers -- they were just in the same rooms -- everybody said, "Oh, my goodness."

WOOLSEY: Thank you.

The rest of you...

BUTLER: Yes, I think we talked about what the reaction of the teachers are to reauthorization. I recently met with our math curriculum group and they said, "Well, it's just another thing coming down the road, you know," because I was sharing with them the common core standards for mathematics, and I said, "Here's what we're going to be doing," and they said, "Well, you know, we have a new president, a new governor," and all of these excuses.

And what I told them is we are in a time in our history where we need to transform schools. We're not talking about reform; we need to transform schools.

If we're going to meet the needs of the 21st century for our students we must transform, and that means that we're not going to go backwards. We are not going backwards to the way it was done in the '90s or the '80s or the '70s, that we are looking forward. And that is the way it's going to be.

So are there questions? There may be questions, but as a leader you have to say, "Well, sorry. We're looking forward."

SIMMONS: I just want to add that teachers are asked to leave our schools if there is some really poor performance sustained over time. I don't want to leave the impression that no one leaves.

WOOLSEY: No, you said very few.

SIMMONS: Some do. Yes.

WOOLSEY: You said very few; you didn't...

SIMMONS: That's right. Very few. Right.

MILLER: (OFF-MIKE)

POLIS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First, I want to congratulate all of you. Really, these are some inspiring stories and show that phenomenal job that many of you and your organizations have done turning around schools, closing the achievement gap through



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innovative and successful models, and providing hope and opportunity to those who have lacked it. It's wonderful to see how turnarounds are possible and that they can be done in a collaborative way.

Before I got to Congress I was chair of our state board of education in Colorado and I saw across the many districts in our state some cultures that were consistent with the kind of changes you're talking about and some school districts that resisted change and really had a resistance to tackling the core reasons behind their persistently failing schools that trapped families in a vicious cycle of poverty and ignorance.

I'm very supportive of our department's efforts to zero in on precisely these schools and A, deploy resources, but as importantly, B, pursue essential conversations and decisions that encourage and support change -- real change at the school level. As Representative Thompson also alluded to, a recent study found that about 40 percent of schools in restructuring status did not take any of the five restructuring options required by law previously. And according to the department, over the past eight years too many states and districts have demonstrated little success and little -- and much unwillingness to undertake the kind of radical fundamental reforms necessary to improve schools that in many cases serve those most in need of educational opportunities.

I'd like to hear your views on a couple things. I'll start with Mr. Silver.

I was very much amazed by -- in your story, in the story of your school -- the culture of your district that encouraged innovation and change, and the fact that they actually built the center -- the Cesar Chavez Center -- not only for your school, they invited people to come in and say, "We need new programs, new schools." What kind of led to that -- to the district getting in that place where they said, "We know we need to do something different," and how did they reach that point?

SILVER: Well, honestly, it was the community. There were about 2,000 people that came together at St. Elizabeth Church -- around 2,000 -- through Oakland community organizations, and they partnered together and they said, you know -- they looked at the APIs, the academic achievement, and the size of the schools in more affluent areas and they saw high achievement, they saw small schools. Then they looked at the poor neighborhoods in the flatlands of Oakland and they saw large schools and they saw low student achievement.

And they said, "This isn't fair. We need to do things differently." So they mobilized and partnered with the Coalition of Equitable Schools, with the Oakland Unified School District, to have the school board pass a resolution to create 10 new small schools that were autonomous and had the exact flexibilities that we're talking about today -- budget, staffing, curriculum, assessment, schedule. So that pressure and that collaboration led to the board making that change, and we were school number nine, and...

POLIS: So you were able to build the political -- you know, always -- generally the inertia not taking action is usually easier than taking action. You were able to build a political movement to make it the easier path taking action politically rather than continuing to avoid taking action.

What suggestions do any of you have on how, from a federal level, we can help overcome resistance and barriers to reform through this ESEA reauthorization process to promote interventions that work and improve student achievement outcomes?

Dr. Simmons?

SIMMONS: I think the first and most important thing is to encourage the local involvement, to get people truly engaged. After the local school councils went into effect in Chicago -- three years, the scores started to go up; they have not stopped. It's in the testimony. For the prior 20 years they'd flat-lined at about 10 percent on the Iowa Test.

The only change that had taken place in those three years was the introduction of the parents and the teachers choosing the principal and deciding the use of the Title I money.

POLIS: So to be clear, what you're saying is get more local than the school district, whether it's neighborhood councils, charter schools, autonomous schools -- bring it back to communities as opposed to kind of the larger district?

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SIMMONS: The State of Illinois legislature looked at what was happening in Chicago. They removed the Chicago Board of Education because of the lowest test scores and the incompetence. And in fact, people went to jail for corruption after that and they put in the councils to replace the authority and local accountability that is so needed and used in places like St. Paul and Edmonton and the state of -- no, the country of New Zealand uses it across the country.

POLIS: I think Dr. King had a quick comment.

KING: Yes. The other thing I would recommend is to look at is systemically. And a lot of times the focus is the campus, and it may be system problems that are, you know, causing campuses to be stuck. So whether it's lack of vision of the leadership, whether it's, you know, political issues, you know, other type of issues, you know, not supporting -- but a system that's allowing a campus to continue to fail. You know, to me the potential there, especially with multiple campuses, there's potential system issues then. I think looking at the system and not just the campus.

POLIS: Thank you all for your testimony.

And I yield back.

MILLER: (OFF-MIKE)

CHU: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Well, I was most impressed by all of you and the achievements that you've made in your school districts. And I was particularly impressed with you, Dr. Simmons.

Coming from a heavily urban area myself, in Los Angeles, I certainly can relate to what you've been able to do and the fact that you've been able to turn around all of these eight schools and have sustained and improved results in six out of the eight over a period of three years is very, very impressive, indeed. What do you think was the problem that led to these low-achieving schools in Chicago that your program addressed?

SIMMONS: I'm sorry. What led to...

CHU: What were the problems -- the fundamental problems -- in Chicago that your program addressed and was able to overcome?

SIMMONS: The leadership at the Chicago Public Schools came to us with a list of 200 schools that they were going to either close or reconstitute immediately, and we were asked, because of the work we'd been doing in these neighborhoods for 15 years getting good results, they said, "Can you take 10 of these schools now?" That was the problem. They did not want to close or reconstitute the schools.

So that was the crisis. And none of them have had to be either closed or reconstituted of the ones they gave us.

CHU: But what was it about the way that the schools were operating that you changed?

SIMMONS: What was it we changed? What was it the school changed?

CHU: Yes.

SIMMONS: They changed their thinking about what they needed to do. When they saw the model that we had been using in other schools in the city they said, "Oh, we're trying to do just that. That's what we want, but we don't know how to do it." So the answer to your question is, we helped them put in place what they had always wanted, and we trained them to do the putting in place as well.

CHU: Well, in addition I'm impressed that you make the professional development and training of teachers and principals lynchpin in your turnaround strategy. Rather than firing them arbitrarily and just dismissing all the staff at

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the school you try to give them the tools that they need to succeed. And what strategies and programs have worked to make teachers and principals part of the solution and why?

SIMMONS: What programs? I'm sorry. What...

CHU: What strategies?

SIMMONS: What strategies? Essentially, it was provide high- quality, on-site professional development for the teachers and the principals. We provided coaching as part of that so that they got coaching and training through workshops.

There was support for the parents in learning the Illinois standards -- something that we've not seen anywhere in the country yet -- so that when the kids came home with the homework the parents knew what author's purpose, one of the Illinois standards, was all about, and they had exercises to use to help the kids.

The same thing in helping the principal and the leadership team create a culture of trust. It already existed to a high level because of the engagement of the stakeholders through the local school councils. A lot of that was already there. We helped them enhance that.

And finally, there was a focus on instruction -- a laser focus -- which used the eight-step system on the back of the testimony, which came out of Brazisport (ph), Texas in the early 1990s, roots in Mastery Learning, University of Chicago, even earlier. That lays out a very precise process for teaching, re-teaching, helping the kids go into success time to get help from each other so that they master the standard.

And the teachers get the feedback immediately every five to seven days. Have they taught correctly or not? So the rigor of the system was enhanced immediately.

MILLER: Thank you.

CHU: Thank you.

MILLER: Just for those who aren't aware, in Chicago -- correct me if I'm wrong, John -- every school has a school board. Unlike one school board for the district and 50 schools, or 100 schools, or whatever it is, there it's local. Very local. Just so people understand when he talks about this connectiveness between school boards and schools, it's one-to-one, so it's a little bit different than most of us experience in our districts.

Mr. Scott?

SCOTT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for holding the hearing.

One of the problems we have is that agencies tend to think of themselves as follows (ph) and only concentrate on their one area, and you end up with programs like -- have things like zero tolerance, which works well for the school system but just transfers the problem to corrections. Everybody knows that there's a high correlation between dropping out and future incarceration and dropping out and teen pregnancy.

Is anyone aware -- anyone on the panel aware of any analysis or research which quantifies the social costs -- the preventable social costs -- for maintained a 50 percent dropout rate in terms of ongoing jail and teen pregnancy-related Medicaid and Welfare costs? For a school of about 2,000 it wouldn't be a surprise to many areas to have about \$10 million floating around in preventable costs.

Let me ask it another way: Is it possible for a school to succeed if you're surrounded by social frivolities (ph) such that one of the programs in an area would be a safe passage program where volunteers have to ring the school so the children can walk to school without being criminally assaulted? Is it possible for a school to succeed in a situation like that?

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SIMMONS: There is very important data on the social costs of underperformance and failure. That data's been most carefully worked up by early child development people over the last 20 years now. It shows dramatically that if you can catch a child at the age of three to five and enhance their capabilities with very modest inputs you're saving \$50,000 per person over their lifetimes.

SCOTT: And if we made those investments in the community so that the community is -- has less of the crime and other problems that you would expect the schools to do better?

SIMMONS: Well, anything that will reduce the crime and stabilize the communities is a good investment.

SCOTT: OK...

SIMMONS: All this data says that I've just reported is that when the quality of the learning goes up then you get this incredible improvement in lifetime earnings where people get through high school, they get through college.

SCOTT: Thank you.

I have a number of questions. I don't think I'm going to be able to get through all of them.

But let me just ask, when a school fails AYP there is a prescribed response, some of which has nothing to do with the failure. For example, if the students -- English learners -- fail after two years all the other students can sneak out the back door and run to another school, which does nothing to the problem. Does anybody think that's a good idea or should the response to a failure to AYP have something to do with the cause of the failure?

Mr. Silver?

SILVER: Yes, I mean 100 percent. I mean, I think one of the things that we need to figure out is, as we're -- in whatever we're doing, it's good that we're looking at subgroups, but we need to make sure when we're looking at subgroups that any intervention or any support is tailored towards supporting them.

SCOTT: Mr. Silver, you mentioned teachers. One of the problems we have is you have a teacher with an excellent reputation, they're likely to get recruited by a number of schools and have choices. And we're trying to set up an incentive program where the best teachers end up at the most challenging schools.

If you have the situation that you've suggested where you get paid more when the students do better you would have an incentive to go to the better schools where the students are going to naturally do better. In fact, if you have a good teacher at a challenging school and a bad teacher at a good school, the good teacher's job is more at risk.

How do we set up an incentive program where we actually incentivize the best teachers to end up with the most challenging schools without these perverse disincentives? SILVER: That's a great question. I think the bottom line is, what I'm talking about is student achievement growth. And I actually think it's easier to move student achievement when it's at dramatically low levels. So a student that's going to a -- a teacher that's going to a school that has students that are more at risk or at lower achievement actually has a great chance to improve student achievement.

SCOTT: And they would see that as a possibility of making more money?

Let me try to get in one last question. Replicability (ph) -- we have a panel of successes, but a school that is failing and looking what to do might not know exactly what you did to succeed. You may have had a charismatic principal or any other kind of thing. Do we have enough research and best practices so that a failing school would necessarily know what to do if they wanted to?

BUTLER: I think if you look at themes across the panel today you will see the theme of collaboration; you're going to see a theme of community involvement; and I liked what Dr. Simmons said, when the teachers are voting programs within their school. I think all of those things are common themes that would run across any demographic in the United States.

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JOHNSON: I also think it's critical, though, that if you bring in supports for these schools earlier on -- so you bring in some outside supports to help them assess where they're at, look at their data, talk about engaging the community -- that was a question earlier -- you bring folks together and have them look at the data, see what's possible, and see where their deficits are particularly, whether it's an ELL population issue, whether it's an over-identification of special ed (ph), or whether it's an overall student achievement issue, if you've got more support up front in that needs assessment and that planning process, that's going to allow a school to pick and choose among those research-based elements that they need to focus on most to get those critical gains in the beginning.

SCOTT: There's enough research out there so they know what to pick from?

JOHNSON: I think there's enough for folks to get started. I mean, everybody across here has identified those same themes. So that's a good clue to us that these are the themes.

But no, there's not enough research to say, "This is an exact science and we know that the instructional focus is, you know 80 percent of this, and the leader is 30 percent, or 20 percent," whatever. We need more research to figure that out.

But I would argue that it's not necessarily research in the traditional sense of these large random control trials that take years, but -- while those have value and merit -- but that it's really about this data collection in real-time. So look at all these models people are doing now and figure out what those core data elements are.

MILLER: (OFF-MIKE)

SIMMONS: Yes. You asked if there was research that could guide schools in this situation. The answer is yes. And we do need more research, as well.

But here's what the research tells us: The schools that are in our testimony in Chicago, based on 20 years of research in the city and around the country, including around the world with high- performance organizations like from the private sector -- all these things show the same thing, and that's being put into the schools that we're working with.

For example, schools that (inaudible) the five essential supports in Chicago are one-tenth the level of performance as those schools that do apply them. So when you apply the essential supports you get 10 times the increase on the Illinois and Iowa Test scores. Pretty dramatic (inaudible) in the research that there.

It's like baking a cake. If you leave out one of the ingredients of a cake you're not going to have a cake. If you leave out one of the essential ingredients, as the research shows, you aren't going to have a high-performing school. And we've got 20 years of data showing that.

MILLER: Ms. McCarthy?

MCCARTHY: Thank you, Chairman.

I want to thank everybody for your testimony, because you certainly, in my opinion, pinpointed a number of things that we are being challenged with as we go forward on reauthorization. As you know, the blueprint that we're following certainly has a fairly large component for charter schools.

And I have about five or six underserved areas in my district, and yet there's one school that comes under that underserved area that has 93 percent of minority students, but they have a superintendent, they have a principal, they have other teachers that all work together. Ninety-four percent of their students go on to college. The dropout rate is almost nonexistent.

So when Secretary Duncan was here I said, "Why are we looking at the schools that are failing? Why aren't we looking at the schools that are doing well?" I have nothing against charter schools; I have a couple in my district. But the problem is, if we're going to start spending more money into the charter schools, that's going to come away from our public schools.

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And to me, the solution is, as all of you have basically stated, that if we don't put in the core components into our legislation we're going to be in the same place 10 years from now. I do not see the answers, you know, just by going into a new mold.

So when we look at the effective collaborate leadership, strong emphasis on improving institutions, teachers supported and continually working together to increase their own learning, and a professional community, rich (ph) challenging circumstances, parent involvement -- we had a program in my district, Project GRAD. It did terrific. Then we got a new superintendent and the project went out.

The project went over to another high school, did terrific, still doing well. Unfortunately, we're hearing that our superintendent there will be leaving and we don't know.

So if we don't do this on the federal level I'm afraid that with all the great, you know, teaching programs and everything else that are out there, this has to become what we see as the future. What bothers me is everything that each and every one of you have talked about -- why doesn't it make sense to develop a model that builds on these components, mainly because we actually don't have all these components in the blueprint?

So I throw that out to you, what your opinion is. I know Dr. Butler, you're in a rural area. You would never have an opportunity, most likely, to have a charter school. And yet you took your school and turned it around.

So I guess I would just like your input on what we're all talking about on improving education, which we thought we were going to be able to do with Leave No Child Behind. We have this opportunity now. The solutions, I don't think - - you know, they're certainly challenging, but they're not difficult. I'll take a response from anyone.

BUTLER: I would agree with you that, you know, as I think about education and where we're going, you know, we're not -- this isn't rocket science. You have people that care doing instructional strategies and curriculum and aligning to the standards, you are going to get improvement.

One thing that jumps out to me as we were -- as I listened to this discussion is the impact of the school leader. You mentioned that, you know, when a superintendent leaves maybe the program doesn't get continued, and that's a shame. But even there, you can evaluate a superintendent or put an evaluation in place for a superintendent based on national standards of school leadership that will encourage the person next to continue those programs.

So I guess just the nature of being an educator, I like assessment and I like to know where we are all the time, and I like evaluation. So, you know, to make sure that those programs get continued, you know, look at how you're evaluating your superintendent, your high school principal. And if the school district wants that to be continued then that should be placed in there.

MCCARTHY: I'll just make one final comment. I know that we're talking about looking at schools that are failing, but to be very honest with you, yesterday we had school board elections all across New York State for the budgets, and I'm happy to say that the majority of schools on Long Island, anyhow, passed their budget, even during these economical hard times. But I will also say, looking at and following the scores of, quote, schools that are really doing quite well, as they say, are actually not really doing that well. We have a number of students that are excellent; we get five to 10 winners every single year in some of the largest country competitions.

But it's our middles students which this country is going to need that need to also improve to race to the top. They are capable of it, but we work, certainly, you know, all we can with those students that are showing the brightest. But we also work very hard with those that need to go through IDA.

But we tend to forget, sometimes, the larger population of students who are right smack in the middle, and I think we could improve on that with the programs that you're all talking about. Thank you.

MILLER: (OFF-MIKE)

TONKO: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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What I heard from a number of people -- and let me thank the panel; I think you have provided a lot of insight that's valuable -- what I hear is talk about incremental improvements along the way and using data that are collected to respond to some of the reforms that are required.

The cost effectiveness of, Dr. Simmons, of your program as it relates to the progress with our students compared to some of the alternatives that are suggested out there -- could you share any additional information with us on that cost effectiveness of your thinking, of your concepts?

SIMMONS: Yes. The five essential supports model is very streamlined. It eliminates those elements that really are not highly cost effective.

So what it concentrates on is what happens during the school day. That's one thing.

And second, it finds that if you use the existing teachers and principals and train them up it's much less expensive than residential training programs that go on for a long time and it's very expensive to select those people in the beginning. Residential programs are fine; they're getting fine results.

But the cost effectiveness is part of the problem, and that's why we get a \$24 million tax saving over a four-year period when you compare our program with schools that have the more elaborate programs. \$24 million over four years for the eight schools. That's significant.

TONKO: I have also listened intently about some of the comments made about Title I, and letting those dollars flow in accordance with formula and need. In my observation -- and I was formerly on the Education Committee in New York State in the state legislature -- and saw, and see today in the capital city of New York, a very difficult situation where there's a super-saturation of competition that is taxpayer-funded that competes with the public system.

In these given days of state and federal budget dilemmas there is not a finite amount of money that we can invest, and I think it's our highest priority of investment in education. Given that as a fact, where do we need to be in terms of -- an observation is that the systems that don't get their appropriate Title I funded are those that are then failing, and then we throw the competition in that at times, in my opinion, is unfair competition.

I chaired the Energy Committee when I was in the State of New York. I saw public power and all the good it brought, and I saw the private sector and industrial concepts that were brought by our utilities, where there's a for-profit column.

Can we afford to pay for profit at a time when we can just funnel Title I monies into systems where the children are failing? Because if we did our job correctly in the beginning we might not need to get into this more perverse (inaudible). Any comments?

SILVER: I mean, I think that the bottom line is that schools that have high Title I populations -- that have high poverty populations -- in these economic times need more, and they are underfunded right now. And PTAs at more affluent schools are raising hundreds of thousands of dollars to offset this. We need to take this seriously.

We need to make sure that we are -- at this time of increasing expectation we need to increase resources not just to schools that are doing well, but to all schools that have high poverty populations. That's what I'm saying.

And I think that at the end of the day we need to have incentives to push districts so that they are going to provide the type of flexibilities that we're talking about that are necessary conditions and incentives and replications, and also any school that has a high poverty population, it is our responsibility -- we need more funding for those schools.

TONKO: Yes, sir. Dr. Simmons?

SIMMONS: I think it's important to be very clear about what the root causes of these problems are we're talking about. Research has established decades ago that poor, low-income children, minorities can learn to the very highest levels. That's established; that's out there; no one debates that any longer.

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So what is the problem? Well, when I look at it it looks like it's a leadership problem -- leadership that is not informed, or is informed and unwilling to make the decisions that they need to make for all kinds of reasons, including political and financial reasons.

So when you apply this research, as those of us who are sitting up here are doing, you get these amazing results. Well, let's apply the research. That's so obvious because when you do it you get these results and it doesn't take forever; we're getting schools turning around in one year. No one believed in Chicago that that could happen.

TONKO: Leadership problem at what level?

SIMMONS: At all levels in the system. Principals don't have the highest of expectations.

The assistant superintendents feel that they have to supervise closely the failing schools with using management techniques that haven't been practiced in the private sector for 30 years. They aren't empowering people in the buildings.

And at the superintendent level, they've got too many other things they're worried about and they aren't focusing on applying the research. That's as simple as I can state it in terms of the core reasons why we have these problems that you folks have to deal with.

TONKO: Ms. Johnson?

JOHNSON: I think when you look at funding and what can we do to make a difference that's, again, where you have to look at the whole system. And where we can get leverage points -- I mean, to Dr. Simmons' point about leadership, how are we working with higher ed (ph) institutions and other institutions to equip -- build a pool of qualified principals that know how to do school turnaround or to train the ones we already have? We could get a lot of mileage out of that because you can centralize what you're doing in sets of higher ed (ph) institutions and then put those leaders out into the field.

There's other things like that I think we can do to think about funding the system and funding points of leverage for replicability (ph) without necessarily, you know, just going to each individual school piecemeal by piecemeal. That, I think, is too expensive of a proposition.

MILLER: (OFF-MIKE)

GRIJALVA: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for the hearing.

Consistent themes: high expectations, leadership. I think following up on my colleague's question, the resources and attention that must be given to schools that have challenges, be it poverty, and be it underachievement. Those seem to be consistent points to this discussion.

I want to ask about, you know, as we talk about school turnaround we must inherently, I think, begin to prepare teachers and schools for the transformation that's going on in the composition of our schools. And this includes the increasing number of children with primary languages other than English.

And so let me begin with Dr. King, and anybody else (inaudible) with this question: What's the important role in the turnaround strategy of having teachers prepared to address that particular need of children whose primary language is other than English? (inaudible)

KING: I think it's imperative. You know, down there on the border in South Texas, the districts I've worked in, the majority of the students, you know, come to school with a language other than English, basically Spanish being the primary language, and it's imperative that teachers have the training and everything.

There, in both districts I've worked in, we've moved forward to basically the dual language concept and tried to develop both languages to a very, very high level. And we're at a point now of beginning to graduate cohorts of students who are college-ready in either language, and we have found that as a good way to accelerate.



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So in our case, having teachers that are well-trained in working with students -- teaching a second language, and also having teachers that are well-educated themselves in the primary language to do a quality job in that language as well.

GRIJALVA: Thank you.

BUTLER: In Ridgway we had two families move into our district and we went from zero ELL students to 10, and we had a very hard time -- and to be very honest with you, we were out of compliance because we could not service those students. Just a case in point, you know, when we tried to find a Spanish teacher it took us one year to find a qualified Spanish teacher, and that's even above and beyond the ELL students.

So there are, you know -- the challenge is, you know, when you have those fluctuations in my district, how are you going to address those students effectively?

MILLER: (OFF-MIKE) Go ahead and answer, Mr. Silver, because I was kind of mystified by how you were managing this exceptional caseload of ELL students.

SILVER: So when we started we had 0 percent of our students were at grade level or above. Now we have 54 percent of our ELL students are at grade level or above in ELA, and in math we have 80 percent.

One of the things that we did was, as I said before, we observed at schools that had high ELL populations and saw what they were doing. We saw a couple of things: Number one, they had amazing teachers, so we went out and got the best possible teachers and supported our teachers as we went forward. Number two, they had different strategies, like thinking maps, where there could be visuals to support the English language learner. And number three, they had a reading campaign.

When we looked at our data and we saw that only half of our students actually were reading at home we knew we had to make a change. So we instituted a reading campaign where books were all over the school, parents were reading with their kids during the school day, and we challenged the kids to read 30 minutes a day every single day for the rest of the year. And if they did that, at the end of the year they would have an incentive. One year I got on the roof; another year -- right now my hair's kind of matted down, but it's actually froed out -- and I'm going to shave my head the last day of school if we reach our goal this time.

The bottom line is, whether it's college, whether it's whatever, investing everyone in a big goal -- and specifically literacy for ELL students -- is a key component.

BRIDGES: I think another piece that's important is to consider the needs of the families that support the school. And when you have many families for whom English is their second language we need to reach out to them as well.

Culpeper has a liaison parent who is bilingual. She meets with parents, helps them fill out the forms necessary for registration, helps them navigate all of the things that they need to know when they come to this country, when they come to Culpeper, what are our expectations, what do they need to do as a parent.

School can be a very frightening place even for parents for whom school was not successful or a happy place. When you're coming in with a language barrier that can be even more scary, so I think it's important to provide programs for parents reaching out to them to teach them English and give them opportunities to access the curriculum and our expectations in their own language.

SIMMONS: So what I've heard this morning is the evidence is pretty clear that the answers are there. The question is why they aren't getting out there and being applied.

This is where the federal government comes in. I think the federal government is the only hope in the country to help scale up these programs and provide the kinds of demonstration projects that need to be in every state so that people can easily get to see them.

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We get hundreds of people coming to visit our schools, but they don't have the money to travel more than a couple of hours. But they could travel to the demonstration sites across the country if the federal government were to actually focus on providing demonstration sites of these best practices.

GRIJALVA: Mr. Chairman, I just want to thank the panel because the responses regarding English learners from the people that responded was many times that becomes an excuse, and you're approaching it as a resource that needs to be developed and given the same opportunity, and I appreciate that very much.

MILLER: (OFF-MIKE)

CLARKE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you to the panel. Your dialogue has been very stimulating today.

And I wanted to pick up on some of the points that my colleague, Mr. Tonko, raised. I'm from New York City and our system was changed about 10 years ago to a narrow (ph) control system due to many of the findings that, I guess, happened in Chicago with school board corruption.

But since then we've had some challenges. We've introduced the charter school movement, but it isn't scaled to the point where it helps the vast majority of public school students in the city of New York.

My first question is to you, Mr. Silver. In your testimony you described how you turned around your school.

One of the elements that you mentioned as being key in your school's success is that the teachers were required to observe the pedagogy at high-achieving schools. And it is my understanding that charter schools are supposed to be an incubator for innovative approaches to teaching and education, and charter schools are then supposed to disseminate their best practices to public non-charter schools.

One of my concerns is that this information sharing has not happened and is not happening. However, your school seems to have bridged the gap. So would you discuss the relationship -- specifically the information sharing -- between your teachers and the teachers at the public non-charter schools?

SILVER: Sure. One of the schools, I remember, we implemented a new program at our school in math and some of our teachers had some questions about it, and there's a school called Acorn Woodland in Oakland, which is achieving massive dramatic gains in a high-poverty population

And so I contacted the principal -- she was also part of the small schools movement -- and said, "Could we bring our teachers over there to learn kind of what's happening with yours?" They went over and then after that observation that meant much more than whatever I could say or whatever some outside consultant could say in terms of that program, seeing the students in action. Similarly, that same school came and observed some of our teachers and some of the strategies that they were using and implemented them going forward.

You know, one of the things that got me into this work, I remember when I was outside of the Teach for America office, where I used to work, and someone said, "You know, why don't we create a new school?"

And then I said, "Well, you know, that's cool," but then I heard, "Why don't we create new schools?" The bottom line is, if we have networks of schools where people are collaborating, that is going to retain principals; that is going to retain teachers and spread best practices.

CLARKE: Let me ask you something. You mentioned you went to another small school. Is that school also a charter or was it non- charter?

SILVER: Right. So, we are not a charter school -- Think College Now. That other school is not a charter school as well. So we have learned from charter schools; we have learned from non-charter schools; we've learned from Oakland Unified Schools. We've learned all across the board.

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I think the one thing that I would say, though, is that we need to do more sharing, and if we are going to make sure that our schools that are succeeding that are not charter schools within the public school district, we need to provide the charter-like autonomies for them to stay in the district and the resources that will allow that to happen.

CLARKE: My next question is for both you and Dr. Simmons.

I find what you're doing in Chicago phenomenal, and I don't know if folks in New York have contacted you yet, but I'll probably be calling.

I firmly believe that parental and community involvement is often marginalized. It certainly has under the structure that has been set up in the city of New York, where it's a top-down governance structure, and pretty much the parental bodies that exist, if they don't agree with the leadership, oftentimes get shuffled around and changed.

In fact, research shows that parental involvement and highly effective teachers are two of the keys to educational achievement. So I strongly believe that the importance of parental and community involvement -- I believe in it so much that my support for the ESEA bill is a bit wavering because I just don't see where it exists in the turnaround models that have been put forth.

With that said, parental and community involvement are key parts of the schools' turnaround success. My question is, what do you do to get parental buy-in at your schools?

And second, you mentioned requiring parents to sign a contract to attest to the involvement in their child's education. How did your school handle parents who do not live up to their contract, and do you kick their child out of your school?

SILVER: We're a public school. We cannot kick out and have never kicked out a student of our school.

The contract is an interesting thing. You know, what we say to families is when they're coming in our doors, say, "Expect more from me as a principal; expect more from your teacher. And I'm going to expect more from you as a principal."

So what the contract does is put something in that says, "Hey, if we want our kids really to go to college this is what it's going to take." If they're not going to -- if a specific parent is not actually abiding by that contract I'm going to go to them, or our family resource center is going to go to them, and say, "What is holding you back?" Our responsibility is to remove those barriers, to call the boss of someone and say, "Hey, you're legally allowed to be here for two days without repercussions to make sure that you're at a parent conference."

Find out what the specific barrier is and try to remove it. I had a parent who was a founding parent of our school say, "You know, I wasn't really that into reading; I wasn't interested in this," but now is so involved and came to so many community meetings to create the school. We need to create incentives, remove barriers, and support for our families.

SIMMONS: The way to get parent involvement? Well, you have the evidence, again, right in front of you with the experience in Chicago with the parent councils. There are eight parents and community members, two teachers, and the principal on that council.

Our parent programs sometimes have 50 to 100, 120 parents come to these workshops. Why? Because it's directed at the parents' needs.

The parents want most of anything -- and we interview them -- survey them once a year -- they want to help their children with their homework, and that's what we give them, the very best tools to do that. And they come. The council helps bring those parents out.

So there is much more to this local school council thing than a lot of people really understand, because the principals depend on these parent councils to go out and handle parent and community problems. So it's really a collaboration that exists when these councils work.

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Yes, and there are about 10 or 15 percent of the councils that don't work in Chicago. That's just like the number of - the percentage of Fortune 1000 companies that don't work -- the governance of them don't work very well either. So I don't see that as a problem.

But look carefully at the council thing. It's made such a difference, and a whole country like New Zealand, as well as in St. Paul, where they doubled their test scores in four years after putting in the councils. It took us over 10 years to double our scores, but still we got them there.

MILLER: Mr. Hinojosa?

HINOJOSA: Thank you, Chairman Miller. Thank you for bringing together this impressive panel to discuss best practices in school turnaround.

Reforming our nation's dropout factories and their feeder middle schools in this ESEA reauthorization is a priority for me. As you know, I introduced H.R. 4181, the Graduation Promise Act, to address this issue.

In Texas we are extremely proud of Dr. Daniel King's outstanding leadership and success in turning around our lowest-performing high schools.

Dr. King, we greatly appreciate your taking the time to come to Washington for this ESEA hearing. Looking at your presentation and some of the graphs that you presented us with, it's very impressive to see the improvement that you have caused there in those schools in PSJA, and I just want to say that we are going to learn from what is working for us in deep South Texas so that nationally we can include it in the reauthorization.

You accomplished the goal which naysayers had predicted it can't be done, and that was to improve and get more students to graduate from high school. I applaud your extraordinary leadership. My colleagues on this committee thank you for traveling and giving us your ideas on how we can use it.

Sorry. I'm so sorry, Mr. Chairman. I've been running from one committee to another and...

(UNKNOWN): We should dance.

(LAUGHTER)

HINOJOSA: I'm so sorry. I turned it off.

My first question, Dr. King, is what elements are essential to any school or school district to reform the effort that you talked about? How have you been able to maintain continuous improvement? How have you been able to get these things done that have made the improvements at PSJA in deep South Texas?

KING: Well, I think, you know, I think that, you know, leadership and having a vision does matter. And, you know, I think, you know, believing in our students that all of our students, you know, can achieve well, not making excuses and identifying -- in every community there's strengths. And so there on the border, you know, for years in a -- you know, for many parts it was looked at that because our students are -- it's one of the poorest areas of the country -- that because they come from low-income households, migrant farm workers, immigrants, because Spanish is their first language -- looking at those as excuses for not achieving.

And we can also look at those students and those experiences and find, you know, many strengths, and we can take the language they do have and, you know, and build on that. Spanish, you know, comes through the Latin language, which is the root language of many -- of science, and medicine, and so forth. If we strengthen students in that area, when they go on to the sciences they are going to have, you know, advantages.

So valuing what they have from home -- certainly teaching them English to a high level, but valuing what they bring, valuing the tenacity that comes from the migrant farm worker, from the immigrant who has fought to get to this country, looking at those things and identifying, and valuing, and empowering, and realizing that those students, you know, have great potential.

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HINOJOSA: Tell me, what caught the attention of Melinda and Bill Gates about your work that they would want to invest in expanding your work down in deep South Texas? KING: Well, one of the things is that -- I think a viewpoint of not looking in many cases -- you know, going beyond the early -- initial early college high school concept, which is pulling some students together, whether they be chosen by lottery and everything, and looking at scaling up and for all students, so whether in Hidalgo, where the high school is 800 to 1,000 students, turning the entire high school into an early college high school, or in PSJA, opening -- yes, it's an island of excellence there at T-STEM Early College High School, but from the very start saying this is going to be open to impact the 8,000 students, and not being satisfied with 400 students who attend that high school and do great things, but how can that impact the entire district?

And not bring in visitors over to see that school while the other schools are failing, but how can that school be used to -- basically to help us transform the entire district to show what's doable for all students then there's not excuse not to do it for all students, so...

HINOJOSA: Thank you.

KING: ... it's the all student approach.

MILLER: Mr. Holt?

The bells you hear, we have votes starting here so I want to make sure we get through the...

HOLT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thanks to the witnesses for really excellent and uplifting testimony.

Our job, of course, is to devise legislation to scale up successful schools to serve all 50 million schoolchildren in America, and you've laid out a number of what sound like necessary ingredients of professional development, and learning teams, and engaging parents and community members. Let me focus on one thing that has come up from several of you.

I'd like to hear first from Dr. Simmons and Susan Bridges with regard to assessments, and if time allows maybe from others of you. You've talked about benchmark assessments and growth model assessments with real-time feedback weekly, monthly, disaggregated data used in real time to guide instruction.

Three questions: Is that essential for school success? If it's essential, how is that written into legislation?

And third, what is the teacher's role in this? How do you get teacher buy-in for these assessments? Do they have a role in developing the assessments school-by-school?

SIMMONS: I'm happy to start that. Yes, assessment is essential.

Tell me how teachers get feedback unless they have data. They don't know if the lesson is taught properly or not. In our schools they get the feedback every five to seven days by looking at the assessments that they design around those specific Illinois standards.

Second, how does it get into the legislation? I may have to think a little bit about that one because of the process.

But let me go to the third point: how to get the teacher buy-in. As I mentioned earlier in my testimony, schools are not accepted in our effort unless they get a vote of 80 percent of the teachers in each school, and a buy-in to the assessment process as well.

It's the eight-step assessment process developed in Brazisport (ph), Texas, in the early 1990s. It's used in many cities all over the country, and including the Broad Award people in Aldine, Texas, for this year -- this year's Broad Award.

HOLT: Got it. OK.

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SIMMONS: So that's how we get the buy-in. They agree, and then we have them -- that's the first piece.

The other piece, and even more important, is that they then need to participate in the selection of the assessments, in reviewing the assessments, in making sure that they work well. So we get the buy-in incrementally as they get -- participate more and more in the process of applying the assessments.

So we get big time buy-in by the time the first six months is done, a year, from virtually all the teachers. They say, "This is the best thing we've ever had; why haven't we had this before?"

MILLER: (OFF-MIKE)

BRIDGES: I would agree, assessment is essential. You can't tell where you're going unless you know where you are, and the assessment gives you that information.

Buy-in, I agree, teacher selection is critical, but also if you put the data in their hands and teach them how to use it, that's critical. You can hand them a piece of data and they don't know what it means. You've got to give them the time and the training to say, "How does this data affect my instruction? What does it tell me about my instruction?"

It's amazing how it removes excuses, because data is not subjective; it's objective. It is what it is. It tells a story.

And if you can get teachers looking at the data and using it as the discussion point as opposed to, "Well, I think -- well, I think this is what's going on," or, "Well, I think Susie had a bad day," or -- the data just tells a story, so I think the key to the buy-in, once they see that the data really does reflect on their instruction and it really does tell them what direction they're heading and what direction they need to go, you'll get the buy-in. It's a payoff.

BUTLER: I would also suggest, we attempted to do our benchmark assessments in our school district online so we could have that immediate feedback. Our technological infrastructure could not handle that, and therefore we still have a two- or three-week lag to get our benchmark assessments.

So I would just ask that any consideration be given that the capacity for the school districts to actually be able to do an online benchmark assessments would be there...

SILVER: I think this is totally essential -- benchmark assessments -- and I think the key to ensuring that teachers have investment in it is, number one, that it informs instruction. And the way that it will inform instruction is making sure that it is not only aligned with the high-stakes test, but also the specific standards that they're teaching as well as that there's time and tools to be able to use that data effectively.

MILLER: (OFF-MIKE)

DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm sorry I missed the best practices discussion, but I really wanted to get in and have a chance to just hear perhaps the last few minutes.

I wonder if -- and it may be that you have dealt with this -- talking about principals, because we know how important a principal is. I know that you've discussed this.

When it comes to teacher evaluation I think we have some of the ideas about on what you base that in terms of data. What specifically do you think are one or two of the most important ways to actually evaluate principals? And secondly, how do you recruit some of the best individuals -- and they may be from education, they may not be -- to head up some of our schools that could use the kind of assistance from a very energetic and qualified administrator?

BUTLER: I think the first thing that you must look at are the standards of how you will evaluate the principal and you look at data. There is no question about it -- you must look at the school data. Now, that data could be student achievement data, it could be -- they call it 360-degree evaluation, where you have community data, student responses, all those different aspect of being a principal are in that, because being an effective principal is essential -- is absolutely essential -- for any school turnaround, regardless of the model.

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SILVER: I would agree with that. The number one thing is that any evaluation in it needs to be focused on data, whether it's principals, whether it's schools, whether it's teachers. And when we're talking about data it can't just be high-stakes testing data. It also needs to be focused on growth. It needs to have multiple measures as well.

And in terms of support, I think that looking at networks that have worked, like New Leaders for New Schools, looking at pipelines through Teach for America, looking at other programs that are getting strong people in our system is essential.

BRIDGES: And continuing with mentoring programs for new principals. To jump into a principalship, even if you have been an assistant principal -- not all models of assistant principal roles are the same.

The assistant principal role should be a training for a principal, but in some cases they are delegated the discipline, the stuff that the principal doesn't want to do. So when an assistant principal finally does become a principal it can be a real eye-opening experience to all the things that are required.

So mentoring, an experienced principal being paired with a new principal will really provide that support and those resources that they need to be successful and be a successful leader.

SIMMONS: The best way to get the evaluation done on the principals? Talk to the stakeholders. Don't forget the parents; they're absolutely crucial.

People think that independent schools have a great way of creating and sustaining principals. Well, those are parents on those independent school boards, on those charter school boards. And the local school council in Chicago handles that because those parents do evaluate the principal, and they remove them.

And in the first six years of school reform there was a turnover of 80 percent of the principals. Who did that? It was the councils. Yes, some left voluntarily.

So this is an amazing little feedback mechanism that's built into this governance that is so locally organized because it's my child that's getting a bad teacher, and that principal's responsible for that.

MILLER: We're out of here. I want to thank this panel. This has been a remarkable morning.

You know, concerns of this committee and many who are involved in the reauthorization outside in the greater education community has been that these four categories that the administration suggested in their blueprint, which were put forth for us to comment on and look at, are really sort of going back to your baking the cake. You can bake a cake in a microwave; you can do it in an oven; you can do it over a campfire, but if you don't have the ingredients it really won't matter.

And so you can choose to say, "We're going to turn around a school; we're going to reconstitute a school; we're going to close a school." It won't matter if you don't have these ingredients in place.

And I think what you've shown us is that these are common, they are important -- the collaboration, the buy-in, the community, the leadership, the empowering and the professional development of teachers. If you don't do these things -- and you have to more or less do them together -- you're not going to turn around much of anything.

The other one that seems to me that's very interesting here is this constant discussion about independence and autonomy. For you it would be independence at the superintendent's level. For Dr. Simmons, it seems to me, it's independence from the superintendent in a large, centralized system, and he's had some rather legendary battles with this current secretary about what independence meant.

So again, but it's the same issue, whether it's in the small, rural district or whether it's in a large, suburban district or a large, urban district. And what's sort of emerging for me is that these four choices are interesting, but they've got to be fleshed out here.

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And what we tried to here was present -- and a number of the other panels -- that there's a portfolio of things you need to bring to this problem of getting better performance out of these traditionally low-performing schools. And what's emerging in my mind is the sense that there is a tradeoff here between flexibility and responsibility for success, and if we're willing to grant people and provide -- and they're responsible -- to provide them that flexibility to make these choices about the ingredients -- I think you'd need sort of a critical mass of them -- but you may change them, then we've got to sort of get out of the way.

And, you know, everybody here has talked about the importance of data and what it drives. I am a believer that that's just a fundamental platform in today's education system. Teachers need -- want, after they get it -- data, and it does that.

So this has really been helpful, and I want to thank all of the witnesses and thank the staffs for putting together this panel. I think you see the response from the members of the committee. There's a lot of sort of urban legends out there why things don't work or the way things really are, and yet, in every one of these in those various situations you're modeling success, and that's really exciting.

We don't get a chance to do success very often. So this is really...

Thank you very much. I won't go on.

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